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HE LIFTED THE GIRL IN HIS ARMS, BORE HER TO THE CARRIAGE, SPRUNG IN, AND AWAY THEY JOLTED.

Agnes Hope, the Actress; or, The Romance of a Ruby Ring.

BY WM. MASON TURNER, M. D.

CHAPTER I.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

WHEW! How raw and cold was this bleak December night of 1887. This night, long to be remembered by some of those who play eventful parts in the story we will tell.

A scowling sky filled with half-gray, half-leaden clouds lowered ominously down upon the city, and the keen north-west wind swept along the almost deserted streets. Then a large feathery flake of snow; then another and another, whirled down; and the spectral atmosphere of the winter evening was filled with white-winged, scurrying battalions, grotesque and weird, flying hither, flying thither!

The hour was half-past seven; yet, though so early, out in the sparsely-settled districts of the large city, where the lamps were few, the darkness was already intense.

A female figure wrapped in shawls and other coverings, trod bravely on through the darkness of the street—through the gray snow-storm which howled around her. She had just turned from Catharine street into Twelfth, and as she faced the wind she shuddered and crouched closer to the walls of the tall somber houses bordering on the way.

That woman was Agnes Hope, the actress, and she was on her dreary tramp to the Chestnut Street Theater, to play her part in the thrilling drama of the evening. She must hurry, too, or she would be late. Come what might she had to be present when the call-bell sounded.

More fiercely drove the wind along the streets, flinging the snow-flakes madly to and fro; more ominous grew the winter sky—more cold and bleak the breath of the storm.

But, the young actress still trod bravely on. The lights from shop-windows were now closer together, and their kindly glare seemed like welcoming beacons to her. But, her breath was going and coming fast; her bosom heaved, and her limbs tottered beneath her. She staggered on a few yards, and then, clasping her arms around the cold, snow-flecked iron post of a gas-lamp, she paused under the full glare.

The beams flared straight down upon her, and revealed a pale, yet beautiful face, bordered by a dark mass of clustering hair, shading it, and gathered away beneath the protection of an age-honored hood tied under the chin.

The eyes standing out of that wan face were wondrous dark—wondrous mellow—wondrous soft and fascinating. Yet they were not bright and sparkling this raw winter night; and the thin, half-blue lids were red with weeping.

The girl could not have been more than twenty-three—perhaps not so old, for the checkered lines of care across the broad white forehead—the deep indentations around the mouth, clearly indicating suffering—the thin, almost cadaverous cheek—the frail, weak form, may

all have added years to her looks, and given her a premature appearance of age and contact with the world.

But, despite her coarse wrappings, despite the careworn, grief-stricken face—despite the despairing look of the large black eyes, Agnes Hope was a maiden wondrously beautiful.

"I must go!" she murmured; "I must earn my pittance, or what *will* become of us! And mother so ill! She is near unto death; I know it—though the physician tries to cheer me—to make me believe otherwise! Suppose mother should die, then I'd be left all alone in this great city, and in the wide, cold world. What would become of me? And that hard-hearted wretch who lets us have the two rooms in which we live! Live! Nay! starve were a better word. Would I, in such an event, be safe from his persecutions, or, would I then—"

She paused; a shudder swept over her frame; and while she clung with one hand to the friendly lamp-post, she drew with the other the old shawl more closely around her shoulders.

But, the girl quickly recovered herself, and glanced around fearfully, as if she expected to see some dread image suddenly arise by her side.

"Then," she murmured, again; "in that dark hour, God pity and protect me from Willis Wildfern! I know my promise and his horrid oath! Would he dare do such an outrage? I could not return his love; but, he loved me, then, earnestly and truly. And—the other, so noble-hearted—so high-minded! I can scarcely realize that he is one of us? There is something so lordly, so lofty, so grand about Frank Hayworth!"

"And in six months he has risen so rapidly, that he has taken us all by surprise. A bright fame awaits him, and Frank deserves it. But, as for me! Alas! alas!"

"And to-night I must play that silly, shallow *role*, and laugh, and sing, and joke and grimace! And my heart sick within me! For mother—poor mother—all that is left to me, is almost dying! A wild thought has sometimes flashed through my brain, and an indefinable fluttering at the heart, which I could not control—a yearning hope—a mad desire, as more than once I have seen Frank Hayworth's eyes bent kindly upon me! Does he think well of me? Does his heart kindle toward me?—toward me, friendless, poverty-stricken Agnes Hope? No, no; he pities me; that is all. He knows my sad tale, perhaps! He knows our wretchedness, and in his great heart he feels for me and for my poor mother. No, no, Frank Hayworth can not love me! I am not worthy of him, and then the tale he has hinted to me more than once! Oh, God! Have I been unguarded—have I been careless—have I forgotten myself, my humble position, and lifted my eyes to him? Have I dared to *love* Frank Hayworth? Good heaven! The answer that comes from my heart—'tis unmistakable! God pity me if I have given my heart to Frank! Yet, I could not help it! And he so kind to me! I would die if I thought he did not love me *some*. To-night we play in the same piece; his eyes will beam so kindly, yet so sadly upon me, and he will *speak* to me! Yet that other tale, at which he has hinted? Ha! yes!"

At that moment the far-off clangor of the bell on Independence Hall boomed heavily on the thick night air.

Breathlessly the girl counted the ringing strokes. She shuddered again; then drawing her shawl once more around her, she muttered:

"Good heavens! Eight o'clock! I'm late! I must be gone at once, for I 'go on' soon, myself; I *must* be there."

As she spoke she turned away from the lamp-post, and plunged ahead in the thick gloom. By this time the pavements were white with spectral drapery of winter, and the jolting hacks and street cars, passing here and there, rumbled with a hollow, deadened sound.

Onward she hurried—her limbs tottering under her, her person thickly covered with falling snow, her feet freezing, her pinched face shrinking under the cold blasts that roared by, until, at last, before her, its bright lamps glittering in the night-air, and flaring under the furries of the winter wind, loomed up the Chestnut Street Theater.

The girl paused, as two gentlemen coming up the street confronted her. One of them, a tall, stout, well-clad, bewhiskered man, suddenly stopped, as his gaze fell upon the white-faced actress.

"Ha! it is you! my pretty Agnes!" he exclaimed, familiarly, chucking her under the chin with his well-gloved hand. "You need not draw away! I'll not *mark* you. You're late, though; the overture has just concluded, and the curtain is up; but—"

"Then do not detain me, Mr. Wildfern; I must hurry," said the girl, endeavoring to push by him.

"Why, Agnes, although you are in a hurry, yet you might say how-d'-ye-do to your *best* friend! Come, now, Agnes, one kiss, and, why—I'll say nothing about the *rent*!"

As he spoke, he stooped quickly over her. But, he suddenly recoiled; for, like lightning, the little cold hand had resented the offered indignity by a blow on his face.

With a half-muttered oath Willis Wildfern turned away, and joined his companion, who was waiting for him.

"Not so easy, Willis, as you thought! Ha! ha!" laughed the other, as the two men hurried on and entered the theater.

Agnes Hope hastened up Twelfth street, and disappeared in the little alley leading to the rear of the theater. A moment more, and she was behind the scenes.

CHAPTER II. A GREAT SHADOW.

AN hour before the events above recorded a dim light burned in the humble lodgings of Frank Hay-

worth, the actor. These "lodgings" were a single room, and a small one at that, in an unpretending dwelling on South Tenth street, below Shippen.

Seated in front of a common table, in the little apartment, was a tall handsome man, of some twenty-seven years of age. He held in his hand a small book containing the *cues* and his *role* in the play to be performed that night in the Chestnut Street Theater. But, the man's eyes were not bent upon the words he had to speak; they were roving listlessly, yet half-sorrowfully, around the limits of the little room.

If truth be told there was nothing especially inviting in that apartment. The ceiling was low, and the plastering cracked here and there; the walls were half denuded of the coarse, gaudy-colored paper, and a damp, moldy exudation stood out upon them. A small, cheap mirror was suspended over the mantle, and above it hung a frame, containing a photograph of a gloriously beautiful girl.

That photograph, and its richly gilded mounting, only relieved the air of poverty pervading the chamber. A chair or so—an old lounge, with its tattered, faded upholstery—a neat, clean bed, a swinging shelf in which a few books were placed—and a common painted wardrobe, made up the list of furniture, if we except a little stove, standing on the hearth.

But, about the appearance of Frank Hayworth, there was nothing to indicate the poverty which showed in the appointment of the lodgings. The young man was clad with a scrupulous attention to neatness and taste—not richly, it is true, but comfortably and well within the requirements of the stern dictator, Fashion.

Frank Hayworth was a handsome man. His head was large and well-shaped—the forehead broad and prominent, and shaded by thick clusters of jet-black hair, waving and glistening. The eyes were large, dark and dreamy in expression; the mouth was completely hidden from view, by a long, sweeping mustache—darker even than the hair, if possible—which flowed down over the massive, iron-like chin. He wore no other beard.

In stature he was certainly six feet, and his form, though inclined to the slender, was, nevertheless, sinewy and well-knit.

The young man suddenly started, as a neighboring clock sounded faintly in his room.

"Seven o'clock already!" he muttered; "and I have not yet learned my *role*. This will not do! I dream too much, and I have forgotten my ONE GREAT OBJECT! I must be diligent, or I will lose all I have gained."

So saying, he bent his gaze on the part before him, and recommenced his "study."

Five, ten, fifteen minutes elapsed, and with a half-impatient, half-triumphant gesture, he cast the little book on the table before him, and rising to his feet, began to walk the narrow limits of the chamber.

"'Tis done!" he muttered; "I know the part; and now will fickle fortune once more favor me? Will I, in my humble part, again win the pleasing plaudits? God grant it! I *am* going up. I *am* making a mark. Success and money will yet be mine! Then, what bar will stand between me and my darling Sadie?"

As he spoke he paused and glanced at the photograph hanging on the wall; then a soft, yearning expression passed over his features.

"Yes, Sadie, you *are* my darling! For *you alone* I live! For no other woman has my heart ever pulsed! And yet—"

He suddenly ceased his soliloquy, as a look of poignant pain all at once contorted his face. His brow wrinkled into a deep, anxious frown.

"Am I speaking the *truth*?" he muttered, in a voice tremulous with emotion. "Can I search my heart *fully*, and say that it has *not* warmed for other woman than Sadie Sayton? Can I lay my hand on that bounding heart, and answer, truthfully, that my soul has not yearned somewhat, however little, for poor, poverty-stricken, angel-faced Agnes Hope? Oh, God! my brain reels as the answer comes back to me—that answer always the same, and ever ringing loudly in my ears! Is it true? Can it be possible? Have I ceased to love, as ever, my beautiful, devoted, fair-haired Sadie? Oh, no! A thousand times, no! Yet, at the name of Agnes, I *can not help it*! My heart does beat more quickly; the blood does grow warmer in my veins, and Agnes Hope's image is incased in my inmost soul! Do what I can, strive as I may, call ever so loudly on my honor and old-time love! *pray* as I may, that image is there, and I can not dethrone it! Why is this? Is it because Sadie is rich, and Agnes poor? Is it that, through human sympathy, I *naturally* turn to Agnes, and am awakened to her tale of woe and poverty? I am poor myself, and that fact made Sadie's father, the proud old Virginian, frown upon me; bid me, with a scowl and a menace, never again to darken his doors, unless I could come there as one *who kept a bank account*!"

The young man ceased his wild talk, and an angry flush swept over his smoothly shaven cheek. He strode up and down the limits of his little room, his eyes bent moodily on the floor, his hands clasped nervously behind him. He seemed to have forgotten his engagement at the theater, the *role* assigned him, and every thing else, in the reflections crowding upon him.

But again he looked up. "Agnes Hope *loves me*! I know it; I feel it! Poor thing! Have I been guilty of encouraging her, or has she been brought near to me by the sympathy I have shown her, by the few acts of kindness I have extended her and her invalid mother? I must heed well my ways—must mark well my words, for Agnes Hope and Allan—myself—must never be more than friends! No, no, Sadie!" he exclaimed, turning sud-

denly and speaking vehemently, as his eyes rested on the lovely face of the budding girl portrayed in the photograph likeness; "I will not forget nor forsake you! You have clung to me through all! You have braved your father's anger, and spurned his unjust restrictions! You are *pledged* to me, darling, and I will remain faithful to you, come what may! And, Agnes, though I will be your friend still, yet, I can be nothing more, cost what it may. But I will protect you: I will stand between you and that persecutor, Willis Wildfern. I will watch that man well; for, unless I am wondrously mistaken, there is about him something which will bear inspection—something which—"

At that moment the door-bell jingled sharp and loud below. The actor halted in his restless promenade, glancing again at his watch.

Instantly he turned, picked up his *role*, stuffed it in his pocket, and hastily drew on his overcoat. "I must be gone!" he muttered; "I 'come on' in the first act; Agnes! she to play that mocking, giddy part! Well, well! the world is not always just in distributing its favors, and so with stage-managers in making up the cast! Agnes *must* play that flippant parrot's part! But, ha! Come in!" he said, as a sudden rap sounded on the panel of his door.

Instantly the door opened, and a tall, portly gentleman, enveloped in overcoat and furs, his beard flecked with snow, entered the room.

"Excuse me, Mr. Hayworth," he said, hurriedly; "I come on business, and will not detain you."

"Yes, doctor; what is it! I am in a great hurry, and behind time now."

"Well, sir, knowing you to be a friend to Agnes Hope and to her mother, I have just called in to say to you, that that unfortunate mother is fast passing away. I don't think she will live through the night."

"Good heavens, doctor! And when were you there?"

"Not ten minutes since. I am now forced to go away for an hour or so to see others who need my care. I thought I would call and tell you, for Agnes, poor child, has gone to the theater, and her mother is all alone."

"What can be done, doctor? Agnes is already at the theater, I suppose, and I *must* go."

"Very little is to be done, Mr. Hayworth. But, just as soon as you can come, do so. And, my friend, if you have an opportunity, break the sad intelligence to Agnes, for her mother *is dying*."

"Dying!"

"Yes; she can not last longer than midnight."

"And all alone! Horrible! Oh, God, what an uncharitable world!"

The doctor turned toward the door; he had nothing further to say.

Promising, however, to return as soon as possible to the house of the dying woman, he opened the door, hurried out, sprung into his carriage, and drove away.

CHAPTER III. BEFORE THE CURTAIN.

FOR several minutes after the physician had gone, Frank Hayworth, the actor, leaned his head on the low mantle and thought deeply. His head was throbbing, and his heart was sad and sympathizing.

"Poor, poor Agnes! Now is her cup full! And to-night—in ten or twenty minutes hence—she comes before an exacting audience in the part of a silly, shallow-pated girl! Alas! how few in that throng will know the trouble Agnes Hope conceals in her bosom! But, people care not! They pay for their amusements, and they will have their 'money's worth,' even if hearts are broken, or are breaking, in the bosom of those who cater to them! Alas, alas, indeed, for 'Christian charity!' A rare article, truly!"

"I *must* be gone, else the curtain will be up before I reach the theater; and in that event there would be trouble. And—to-night—yes! I'll wear the pin which Sadie gave me! My character will allow this privilege; and then it will remind me of darling, sweet Sadie herself. Yes, I'll wear it to-night; *there may be luck in it*!"

Speaking thus, he took out his pocketbook, and, searching through the folds in it, drew therefrom a small parcel, and then the actor held up before him, between his thumb and fore-finger, a glittering diamond pin, in the shape of a hand—the stone being clasped by the tiny golden fingers. For a moment he gazed at the pin, and flashed its light several times in his eyes. Then, with a deep-drawn sigh, he unbuttoned his overcoat, and fastened the jewel in his shirt-front.

The actor was just three minutes ahead of Agnes Hope in reaching the theater that dreary night, and he barely had time to make the necessary changes in his attire, when the call-bell sounded, and he swaggered through a side-scene, and appeared, amid loud applause, upon the stage, as Hawkshaw, the Detective, in the thrilling play of the Ticket-of-Leave-Man.

And Frank Hayworth had already seen poor Agnes Hope, but had no time to speak even a word of greeting to the sad-looking girl, who stood awaiting her turn to appear upon the world's mimic stage as *Emily St. Evermond*.

In one of the front, second-story rooms of the St. Lawrence Hotel, on this same night of wind and snow, a bright light gleamed forth in the gray gloom of the outside air. Within that room a young and radiant girl was walking moodily up and down, her eyes flashing around her, her lips pressed firmly together.

The hour was seven and the maiden had just returned from supper, and sent her serving-maid down for hers.

In stature this queenly woman scarcely reached the medium height; but the loftiness and haughtiness of port, the erect, dignified form, fully compensated for this—if, indeed, it might be deemed a deficiency. Drooping, womanly shoulders, a gorgeous, swelling bosom, indicative of a warm, glorious temperament, a taper, and yet a full waist, and withal a pleasing, decided plumpness of person.

These characteristics of figure marked the girl. A well-turned, nicely-setting head, covered profusely with waving ringlets of rippling gold—a broad, white forehead, unseamed by line at all—arching brows of the same auburn hue—long, silken lashes fringing over large, dreamy, half-melancholy eyes of deepest blue—a straight Grecian nose, with a thin, aristocratic nostril—a ripe Cupid's mouth, even in its repose bewitching and fascinating—a prominent, rounded chin, sloping gracefully away, without an unsightly fold or crease—to meet the noble neck rising, swan-like, from the swelling bosom.

Such were the points of beauty about the maiden's face which caused one to look thrice at her, and then, with a sigh of sadness, turn away; sadness that all who looked could not possess!

Up and down the richly-carpeted room she strode, her step growing more hasty. The longer she walked, the more she thought.

Suddenly she raised her soft left hand, and by an impatient gesture, flung back the clustering ringlets, which had fallen *en masse* over her forehead. As she did so, a stone glittered in the light upon the lily-white forefinger of that small, peachy hand.

The flash of the ring-setting glittered in the eyes of the girl. She paused in her restless promenade, slowly lowered her hand just below the level of her eyes, and gazed intently at the ruby, glowing in the stream of light. A softer expression spread over her features—an intense love-light gleamed in her large blue eyes—the stern expression which had hovered around the closed lips fled away, and then, quick as lightning, a pearly tear stole down, stood for an instant on the soft, downy cheek, and then fell upon the ruby-setting, making, by the reflection of the liquid, the stone to glow with a quadruple radiance.

Poor Allan! I have followed you hither; for I heard that one answering to your description was in this large, bustling city. It *must* be you; for—for there is only *one* Allan Hill!

She paused in her low murmuring, brushed the tear-drop gently from the stone in the ring, and then flung herself into a chair, gazing all the time at the little band of gold circling her finger.

"Ten long months of weary waiting, of never-ceasing heart-ache, have passed since that black night, on the lonely wharf, he bade me good-by, saying that he would come again and claim me as his bride, when money would be in his pocket. He bade me be of good cheer, that he would certainly *come again*. But time has sped, and not a word! Is Allan dead? Oh, no—no! The thought would kill me. Is he *false* to me and my memory? I have been true to him—true under all circumstances—true, despite the frowns of an indignant and unjust father—true to him, in following him now blindly hither, just to be near him—to love him, to cheer him—if, indeed, he be here in this great city.

"The description of him was so accurate, so life-like, that it *must* be Allan. And though three weeks have passed since I arrived here, and I have not seen him, or learned any tidings of him, yet I can not go now, without knowing something definite. I *must*—Ha! Fanny is here."

She stopped speaking, as, at that moment, the door was opened, and a trim-looking negro girl, her head bound around gracefully in the proverbial Southern home-maid's style, entered the room.

"What's de matter, Miss Sadie? Been crying ag'in? Dat won't do!"

"I can't help it, Fanny! I can't help it when I think that I have been here, in this strange city, nearly a month, and have heard nothing of poor Allan!"

"Dat's bad, I know, Miss Sadie. But, de fact is, I think dat Marse Allan ain't here; and, to tell you de truth, Miss Sadie, I wants to go back home—back where I was raised. I don't feel right in dis great big city. And den, for dat matter, I don't believe, as I jist said, dat Marse Allan is here, and if he don't care 'nuff 'bout you to let you know *whar* he is, why Marse Allan ain't no great shakes any way, and—"

"There, there, Fanny! Don't speak of him in that way. You don't know what a noble gentleman he is."

"Dar you is ag'in, Miss Sadie! Always takin' his part! Just like you! Why, I sometimes think dat old master, as I calls him yet, was half right in not letting dat young man court you, for—"

"Stop, Fanny! Do not let me hear you speak thus again," and Sadie Sayton's blue eyes flashed fire, and she stamped her little foot imperiously.

Fanny was evidently awed; she did not wish to anger or displease her mistress. She had played with Sadie Sayton, in old-time days, and the girl loved her "Miss Sadie," as a dog loved his master.

So she quickly said, kindly.

"Lord bless you, Miss Sadie! Don't you know me better dan dat? I wouldn't 'fend you for five dollars—in gold, at dat! No, no, I loves you, Miss Sadie, and I'll stay wid you as long as you wants me. And, for dat matter, I'd follow you to old Satan, if we could only find Marse Allan!"

Sadie's face brightened, a happy smile came over her rosy mouth, and, taking the black girl's hand cordially in hers, she said:

"We mustn't quarrel, Fanny. We have been together too long now; and, Fanny, I sometimes think you are the only friend I have in the wide world;" and the maiden broke down, and burst into tears.

"Dar! dar! Miss Sadie, don't cry! I tell you, dar,

Miss Sadie! You make me feel bad, and—now, dar! I *knowed* it! I must cry too!" And the faithful negro bowed her swarthy face over the glorious, golden-tressed head of her young mistress, and sobbed too.

But, woman-like, the emotion in both mistress and maid was soon over, and suddenly Sadie said:

"Give me the paper there, Fanny. I will look over the announcements, as I may go out."

"Go out! and on such a night!" exclaimed the maid, handing the paper to her mistress. "Why, Miss Sadie, you'll catch your death o' cold. I tell you it is snowing *crful*!"

But Sadie Sayton made no answer. She glanced over the amusement column in the newspaper for several moments.

"Yes, I'll go, Fanny, to the 'Chestnut.' It is only a step from here, and I have long wanted to see the 'Ticket-of-Leave-Man.'"

"See who—what man?"

Sadie smiled. "'Tis only a play—a *show*, as you call it, Fanny, and I would like to take you, but you must remain here and sit up for me. Now help me on with my sack and rubbers."

In ten minutes from that time the beautiful Sadie Sayton, well muffled in wrappings, issued quietly from the ladies' entrance of the hotel, and stood in the street.

The girl shuddered, as the driving wind tore viciously by her, and as the scurrying snow-flakes struck her rudely in the face. But, hesitating only a moment, she gathered her skirts around her, and strode away up the street bravely, in the face of the storm. Ere long she stood at the box-office of the theater.

"We have only *one* good seat in the house, miss, which is vacant, and that is in the orchestra, front row," said the agent, respectfully.

"Give it me," said the girl.

In a moment she had passed the green doors, and stood in the crowded auditorium of the theater.

She heeded not the basilisk eyes of a tall man fastened upon her, as she hurried on.

That man, however, started violently, and drew back.

As the young lady took her seat, the curtain went up, on the first scene of the thrilling play; and there in the aisle stood the tall man, with his keen eyes still bent on her.

Then Sadie saw *him*!

CHAPTER IV.

"HAWKSHAW, THE DETECTIVE."

SADIE SAYTON glanced at the tall, fine-looking man, who, at a sign from the usher, had now seated himself on one of the steps, only two seats from the young girl.

A strange fascination seemed to hang around this stranger; at all events, something seemed to impel Sadie to look at him covertly. His face was one wondrously familiar to her; and with it, there came to the girl a black memory—a memory which time and circumstances had almost blotted out.

Sadie started as she saw the burning eyes of the man fastened upon her, and she turned her crimsoning face away. She could not drive out of her mind those wicked eyes, so lingering, so yearning, nor forget that insinuating smile which played over the bearded face of him who sat so near her; and her mind was still traveling back.

Could it be he?

But the girl turned resolutely away; and then slowly the blush which had mantled her cheek faded out. Slowly the troop of black-winged memories fled away, when she bent her eyes upon the characters who had come upon the stage, as the curtain rolled slowly up.

We have stated that, to Sadie Sayton, there seemed a strange fascination about the man who had followed her from the door of the auditorium, and taken his seat so humbly, not far from her.

We can not pretend to analyze the feelings which held place in the young girl's bosom; we can not tell *why* she could scarcely keep her eyes from this bold, impudent-looking stranger, who shone so in jewels and glossy broadcloth.

Suddenly, Hawkshaw, the detective, in blonde wig and auburn whiskers, entered upon the scene at the tap-room. When he spoke, in a rich, full voice, telling his suspicions of some of the parties before him, Sadie Sayton started violently, and bent her eyes upon the speaker.

Her ears seemed to drink in every word that fell from the actor's lips. A strange shade of doubt, of anxiety, spread over her face; and, unheeding every thing around her, she leaned her head forward, and listened intently.

The man who sat near the girl noted the yearning look, the spreading pallor, the straining eyes; and then, as he shrugged his shoulders, a bright, intelligent expression flashed over his face, and a satisfied smile played over his mustached lip.

He had formed a conclusion.

The play proceeded. Then Hawkshaw strolled listlessly off the stage; and, at last, poor Agnes Hope, in the character of *Emily St. Evermond*, appeared. Then she was gone, and the act-drop went down for the first time.

So intense had been Sadie's interest that, oblivious to all her surroundings, she gazed upon the curtain long after the actors had disappeared. Then, with a long-drawn sigh and a half-sob, she recovered her self-possession, and turned around to find the basilisk eyes of the stranger fixed upon her.

For a moment she eyed him steadily, but turned away half in alarm.

Then the bell sounded—the whistle echoed behind the scenes, and the act-drop rolled up again.

But in this scene neither *Hawkshaw* nor *Emily St. Evermond* appeared.

We will, for a moment, go behind the curtain, and note a *life-scene* enacting there.

Between two of the shifts, on the left, stood Hawkshaw and the girl, Emily.

They were waiting their turn to "go on."

Robbed of their cast-names, we recognize them as Frank Hayworth and Agnes Hope. Despite the disguise he wore, it was easy to see that the young man's face was overclouded by a sorrowful, painful expression. But, as yet, he had not spoken. Agnes was looking at him wonderingly, lovingly.

"Well, Frank?" she said, in a low, sweet voice, and her eyes beamed warmly on him.

The actor understood that look, and taking the girl's hand gently in his, while his fine eyes rested pityingly on her face—that face so unnatural—so ghastly to him in the thickly-spread *rouge* of the character she was playing—he said:

"I wanted to see you, Agnes, for a moment, on business—*serious* business, Agnes;" and he paused.

"Serious business, Frank? And with me? Well, go on, Frank," and the poor girl bent her head, as a crimsoning blush reddened still more her unnaturally-colored face, and a perceptible thrill shook her frail frame.

The young man knew well the emotions which were filling the bosom of Agnes Hope—he knew well that she, poor thing, had prejudged his "serious business"—he knew what *she* thought he intended to speak of.

Alas! poor Agnes! She little dreamed the tidings in store for her.

He still held the girl by the hand.

"Life is very uncertain, Agnes," he began, in a low voice—scarcely, indeed, above a whisper.

"What mean you, Frank?" asked the girl suddenly, a deadly pallor overspreading her painted face, as a hideous thought flashed with the speed of lightning through her brain.

Frank Hayworth did not reply at once; but he gently pressed the thin, cold hand, lying so confidently in his own stronger palm. He knew that the girl's eyes were fastened eagerly upon him. So, in a tremulous voice, he said:

"Your mother is—"

"What, Frank? Has any thing happened?" and she clutched him with all her energy, and gazed wildly at him with her great, staring black eyes.

"Be calm, Agnes; control yourself, and listen to me. Time flies, and I must be brief. Your mother is ill, Agnes—*very* ill. The doctor was to see her not an hour since, and—be brave, Agnes!—he says, *she can not live through the night*. There, there, Agnes; be strong, my poor girl, and—I have to 'go on' now!"

He placed her gently in a seat—there in the silence and gloom between the gaudily-painted scenes—and in a moment more, the young man sauntered again upon the stage, as Hawkshaw, the Detective.

No one in the vast, breathless throng knew the storm that was howling through the actor's bosom then! No one heard the low, stifling wail which quivered for an instant on the air!

But Frank Hayworth heard this cry, and it pierced his soul like a barbed arrow.

The play went on, increasing in intensity, scene by scene, act by act, and Sadie Sayton, more dreaming than waking, sat still and watched him who played the part of Hawkshaw.

Absorbed in the thrilling play—absorbed especially in the noble fellow who played the detective's role—Sadie paid but little heed to the man who so persistently, so impertinently watched her every movement.

The climax of the drama was fast approaching—the act-drop had rolled up for the last time.

Poor Agnes Hope, now as *Mrs. Green Jones*, pirouetted glibly with her stage-struck husband, the vender of veal pies; and not one in the house, save Frank Hayworth, who watched her with sad, sympathizing eyes, knew the terrible sorrow in her bosom.

Then the slides were shifted for the last time, and its closing scene revealed *Jem Dalton* and *Melter Moss* on their burglarious errand, and, following them like a bloodhound *Hawkshaw*, the Detective.

Then the final struggle—then the victory of the detective; and the house rung with thundering plaudits, as in the contest, the wig and beard of the gallant Hawkshaw were inadvertently and unintentionally torn away, and the face of Frank Hayworth, enthusiastic, triumphant and glowing, stood forth in the full glare of the footlights!

But, amid the wild cheers and clapping of hands, there went up from among the orchestra-seats a long, wailing cry.

Sadie Sayton had gazed in the face of Frank Hayworth; and in the actor's shirt-bosom, the girl had caught the sparkle and dazzle of a diamond of the first water.

Then the curtain went down.

Slowly the theater was emptied; the lights were being extinguished; but Sadie Sayton, her brain reeling, her limbs faltering, remained. Near her, silent, watchful as a hawk, stood the bearded stranger.

The girl leaned down, and searched all around her. An exclamation of vexation escaped her lips.

"I have lost it! *His* gift!"

In a moment the man drew near her.

"Can I assist you, miss? Have you dropped anything?" And he bowed low before her.

"I have lost a ring, sir; a ring with a ruby setting. I value it highly." And again she bent down in the search.

The gentleman at once busied himself, likewise, in looking for the lost article.

Suddenly a sparkle at his feet caught his eye. In a moment he had covered the object lightly with his

boot; and then, as the girl was looking in another direction, he stooped, picked up the object, and in the twinkling of an eye, transferred it to his pocket.

"I am sorry, miss; but I fear the ring is lost—for the time, at least," he said; "but I will cause search for it, and if found, will see that you get it."

The girl pondered for a moment. She was loth to leave the ring; it had never been from her finger since that dark evening long ago, when Allan Hill put it there.

But, she saw that almost everybody had gone; so, with a deep sigh, she turned and attempted to move off.

She had miscalculated her strength; for, exhausted with the constant strain upon her mind, startled at the loud, strong voice of the man who played Hawkshaw; shocked at the unexpected discovery; depressed at the loss of the ring; frightened at the familiar face of the stranger, with its dark memories, she learned soon enough that her vigor was gone.

She tottered and sunk back on a seat. The man near her strode forward and took her gently by the hand.

"Allow me to assist you hence, miss; they are closing the house," he said.

The girl rallied, staggered to her feet, and shrinking away from his proffered aid, reeled along the aisle, out through the green doors, into the lobby.

The man hung pertinaciously behind her.

Suddenly Sadie paused, and facing him, said, in a low, unsteady voice:

"Pardon me, sir; but we have met before, I think?" And she raised her eyes fearfully to his face.

"You are right, Sadie Sayton!" he said, promptly. "You and I have met before; and, methinks, you have met that ranting actor, too! But, if it be tidings for you, I'll tell you that he is to be married to that white-faced, sickly-looking girl who played Mrs. Green Jones to-night. Ha! ha!"

A long, wailing, heart-bursting cry from the poor maiden, and, flinging her arms up wildly in the air, she tottered and fell backward.

But Willis Wildfern, the man-about-town, caught the fainting form of Sadie Sayton in his ready arms.

CHAPTER V.

THE DAMNING PROOF.

THE cold blast, rudely blowing in from the street, fanned the throbbing temples of Sadie Sayton; and the blinding snow struck her full in the face, as she lay, limp and helpless in the arms of Wildfern.

The man gloated over her beauteous face and form; and a devilish luster—a wicked look of triumph—gleamed in his eye. He and Sadie Sayton—the girl between him and whom was an old-time link of some sort—were alone in that dark, cold entrance, into which the snow-storm was beating. The box-agent was just extinguishing his light, and the night-watchman was coming up the steps.

"Hullo! what's this, mister?" he asked, sternly, as he saw dimly the form of a woman, locked in the arms of a tall, bearded man.

"No harm, my good fellow," replied Wildfern. "Only a girl fainted from the close air; but she will soon come round, and I'll see her safe home."

The watchman said nothing more, but casting a suspicious glance at Wildfern, passed on into the booth of the theater.

The man-about-town drew the limp form closer to him in his steady grasp; he felt her warm breath faintly upon his bearded face. He suddenly bent his head over her—his lips were almost touching those of the innocent, unconscious maiden, when suddenly a shiver passed over the girl.

Her eyes opened; she staggered to her feet, and, summoning her strength, she uttered a low cry and darted into the street.

Willis Wildfern strode after her, and both were quickly lost in the stormy night.

In a half-minute Sadie stood at the corner of Twelfth street. She paused as if shot, for, at that instant, two forms—one a tall man, the other a slender woman—the latter clinging to the arm of the former—passed by swiftly, going down Twelfth street.

And Sadie had heard a well-known voice say:

"Be brave, be hopeful, Agnes! We will pray for the best; but if the worst is to be realized, look to me, Agnes—trust me always, and, God be my judge! I will not desert you."

And then the two were across Chestnut street, and out of ear-shot.

Sadie Sayton gazed after them with a wild, meaningless stare, as they crossed Chestnut street. For an instant she clung to an awning-post for support.

"Fate bids me on! I must see the end of this. I must learn if he is true or false to me! I must follow on, whithersoever they lead! Oh, God! and he my idol! I must—"

The remainder of this sentence was lost, as the girl strode away down Twelfth street, keeping in sight those whom she followed, and who were now far ahead.

Willis Wildfern chuckled low to himself.

"Ha! ha!" he said, in a low tone of triumph, "I'm in luck; and I'll turn this little circumstance to good account! I must own that girl. I must have her money—real stuff! And, Mr. Frank Hayworth, look to yourself, for I am on your track—a firebrand in my hand! And the link between this dazzling beauty and the vagrant player? I'll learn it yet, for I have the ring. Strange things may have happened since 1861. Well, we'll see! And she a perfect Hebe still! Ye gods! And now I'll hold on to this prize until she consents, by fair means or foul, to be my wife! Lucky dog that I am, that circumstances should thus befriend me! And I can and will yet win her, or she is proof to devotion and flattery, and is different from the great majority of her sex. I'll

follow on and see the end of this farce—a proper conclusion to the evening's entertainment. By Jove! the girl is in earnest, and—why, it'll be the same!"

Speaking thus, the man hurried along swiftly behind Sadie—now a considerable distance in advance.

Frank Hayworth and Agnes hastened on their way. They heeded not the wild storm which was raging around them. On they sped, not a word being spoken by either. The young man heard the labored, heavy breathing of the poor girl; he felt her weight momentarily dragging more and more upon his arm. But he dared not pause; he already feared that they would be too late, and then, they were fast nearing their destination.

At length they reached Catharine street, far away, and turned up at once to the right. Hurrying on a few moments, they paused suddenly before a low, dilapidated house, which, from its appearance, had borne the brunt of many storms.

A light gleamed from a window near the top of the house; with this exception, the lowly habitation was in gloom.

In a moment the door was opened, and the actor and his charge disappeared inside.

Sadie Sayton, hanging close behind, had watched them keenly. Her feet were cold and numb; her hands almost pulseless.

As she saw the two walkers halt before the old habitation, she likewise paused, shrinking away in the deep, drifted snow, under the dark shadows of the house nearest her. And when they whom she watched disappeared from view, the lonely girl heaved a deep sigh, and was about to turn off.

Just then she saw, on the opposite side of the street, the reflection of light from the window of the old house. In that reflected glimmer she beheld spectral shadows moving about. Waiting not a moment, she hurried across the street.

At that instant a long, piercing wail rung out from the old house, and Sadie, glancing up, saw distinctly him who had played Hawkshaw holding a girl in his arms.

And then Sadie Sayton sunk swooning in the snow.

Another moment and the tall form of Willis Wildfern towered over her.

CHAPTER VI.

A LEAF FROM AN OLD BOOK.

ON the banks of the James river, in the county of Charles City, Virginia, embowered in the midst of a spreading grove of oaks, stood the storm-stained mansion of old Colonel Manton Sayton—the house known for years as Sayton Manor.

A lordly, aristocratic old mansion it was. Built of English brick, which, before the war for Independence, were brought over from the mother country, and put up by builders who prided themselves on their work, the massive, substantial structure was well calculated to stand the storms which, for more than one hundred years had beaten upon it.

The residence had been in the family of the Saytons ever since it was built by the old cavalier, Sir Charles, who, for some political reason, was forced to leave his native land, and who, with his family, had come to the then wilds of America. He settled down near the James river, and built the almost royal old mansion which to-day bears his family's name.

The manor had escaped the ravages of the old Revolutionary War, by being taken as the headquarters of an English General, and had passed through the seven long years of strife unscathed.

When that dismal period of blood and carnage had passed, and the ominous battle-clouds which had hung in the air so long a time were blown away by the sounding clarion of peace, the owner of the mansion still found himself master of the old ancestral halls, and of the hundreds of rolling acres spreading around him on all sides.

And so on, down to our day, has the mansion been owned and cared for by those who loved it and its memory.

Colonel Sayton, the possessor of the manor—at the time we have chosen for our story—had well maintained the prestige of his family. And though in his day, too, clouds had lowered over him, yet those clouds had now blown away, and he was happy that he again lived in the old mansion—happy in the company of his charming daughter Sadie—the link which bound him tenderly to the memory of his dead wife, sleeping in the quiet grave-yard in the garden; happy as he passed his time on the spreading farm, and in the quiet precincts of the old manor.

Sadie, his child, was pretty as a nymph, warm-hearted, whole-souled, well-educated, joyous and light-hearted, devotedly fond of her father, heeding his slightest wish, considering it a heinous sin if she failed to please him in the slightest particular.

She was as artless and as innocent as she was beautiful and fascinating. No wonder her old father considered her as the "apple of his eye;" no wonder that she was the queen of the country—nay, of the Tide-water district itself—and that, as such, she reigned undisputed monarch in the hearts of more than one susceptible swain of the neighborhood!

Living about a mile from the manor, and further down the river, was another family—one as old and as proud as that of the Saytons; but it was, in one sense, what might be termed a "broken-down" family.

Hugh Hill, the owner of this farm, dated his ancestry far back in the dead ages, and found his family-name in the landed gentry of England. At one time he had been rich; but, fox-hunting, a reckless

disregard of money, and a lavish hospitality, had made a serious inroad into his treasury. And then, the old man only made a respectable living.

Too late he had awakened to the folly of his past course, and to the dread reality of the future. It was a hard matter for such a person as the open-handed, genial-souled Hugh Hill to stare poverty in the face.

Then the old man determined to turn over a new leaf—to start life again. But just as his resolves were formed, the hollow tones of the tocsin of war echoed through the land, and the red brand of battle crimsoned the sky.

At that time his only child, a son, Allan by name, was absent at William-and-Mary college. The old gentleman was determined that his darling boy should have a good education, already knowing that, were the debts, fast accumulating on the old farm, paid off, he could give Allan nothing else than an education.

Between the two families living so near together, there was no cordiality—no friendship—as might reasonably have been expected. An old feud, dating back for several generations, divided them, and made the two representatives of the families scowl at one another, when, by chance, they met.

Hugh Hill was a hot-headed, impulsive man—one who fancied that every word spoken in his company in an undertone was something leveled at him. But he was an honorable, high-minded man.

Unfortunately, Colonel Sayton was just as hot-headed as the other, and interpreted every thing coming from the Hill family as an affront offered himself.

But Colonel Sayton had another characteristic—one strange for a person living in his section of the land—strange for one in most matters so liberal—for one so careful and proud of the prestige of his family. He was not a stingy, close-fisted man; but he was one who worshiped money, and prized the influence it gave. He had no dealings with poor men; and when Hugh Hill became bankrupt, then there was indeed a yawning chasm, which could not be bridged, between him and Colonel Sayton.

THE BLACK WAVE was sweeping over the land, and Allan Hill was suddenly summoned home from college. By a great effort his father had raked together an amount sufficient to defray the expenses of the completion of his son's education abroad, and the young man was to go at once.

We will not dwell here; we are writing simply a love-story—not a war-chronicle—and we'll hasten on.

It cannot be supposed that Sadie Sayton and Allan Hill had never met. This was almost an impossibility, taking into consideration the surrounding circumstances.

The two young folks, despite the enmity existing between the families, had met, and—long ago; Sadie Sayton certainly reigned in Allan Hill's bosom as queen of love and beauty. The youth madly worshiped the girl, and it was easy for him to see that his love was reciprocated.

Then came the impulsive proposal—the mad appeal. Then the sudden starting, the vicious crimsoning; then the warm, outgushing woman's love; then the half-articulate "yes!"

And then the old story of the quarrel.

But they cared not for this.

Allan Hill and Sadie Sayton were engaged to be married in the year 1861—secretly, of course. But then, there grew up between them a high wall—a barrier which seemed to sunder them forever.

Colonel Sayton frowned, and his face grew as black as midnight, when one day Allan Hill boldly appeared at the manor and asked to see Sadie. Strange to say, he did see the girl; but when he called again with "unblushing front," as the colonel termed it, he failed to see Sadie.

The old gentleman himself met the young man, and told him plainly never again to darken his doors, and that he would not countenance him there, as long as the memory of past events remained with him.

With anger swelling in his bosom, and fire flashing from his eyes, Allan Hill had turned, and without reply soever, left the mansion, mounted his horse and galloped away.

But he had not forgotten Sadie, or turned his back upon her. He still found means of communicating with her, and they met frequently—clandestinely, of course.

Then Allan Hill went to Europe.

About this time a stranger made his appearance at Sayton Manor. By education, at least, he was evidently a gentleman; and his dress and deportment also pointed him out as such. The young man—he was young, and a tall, fine-looking fellow, too—had come down, so he said, on a boat from Richmond, on a hunting expedition. Having missed the returning steamer, he applied at the mansion, late that day, for hospitality. He was not refused; his appearance was, with the colonel, a guarantee of respectability.

This young man and Sadie Sayton met. In an instant, as if by instinct, the girl knew that his heart had bounded at her presence.

Women soon learn this. Maybe by magic. She was not mistaken; for, before the stranger took his departure next day, he had managed to convey to Sadie, most unmistakably, proofs of his admiration. But the girl repelled him with coldness, especially when the stranger made close and impertinent inquiries into the pecuniary affairs of her father.

In a week from that time the young man came again—this time arrayed in all the elegance of fashion.

As the stranger's political views agreed with the colonel's—which had been learned in the former

visit—his visit, though taking the old Virginian by surprise, was nevertheless not distasteful to him.

Not so with Sadie; she trembled violently as she saw the man walking up the wharfway toward the house. She had a foreboding of evil—that evil connected with this man—and to befall herself. But she met him with an inborn dignity peculiar to her, though her manner was frigidly distant and reserved.

The stranger remained a week, and in that time—without the colonel's knowledge or consent—managed to pay formal court and address to the girl.

Sadie was thunderstruck and shrunk frightened away. But she refused him point-blank, and expressed her indignation at his course. The man was stung to fury, and used harsh, insulting language.

The girl was about to scream for help, but the fellow placed his hand over her mouth, and put a pistol to her head, making her promise to reveal nothing until he had gone.

More dead than alive Sadie Sayton had sunk back into a swoon. When she awoke to consciousness the stranger had gone.

And then Sadie tremblingly told her father all. The old man's rage was ungovernable. The very next day he went to Richmond—taking especial pains before he left home to stick a brace of old-fashioned dueling pistols in his carpet-bag.

But the next morning he returned from a fruitless errand. The stranger had left Richmond.

At that time Sadie was not quite sixteen. And the name the stranger gave was Willis Wildfern.

Then the hideous BLACK WAVE of civil war, which had come so suddenly, finally rolled away, and Colonel Sayton was still the owner of his old mansion; he was soon again surrounded by plenty.

Not so, however, with Hugh Hill. He had died suddenly some time before, and his ancient residence had been burned by a band of raiding horsemen.

At last, after a long absence abroad, Allan Hill came home, crushed in spirits at the death of his father; and when he reached the old farm, he found himself homeless, and almost without a penny.

Time passed. Allan and Sadie met again. They were still true to each other; but, that barrier already erected in the past, had grown broader and higher between them. For Allan Hill had soon sold the old farm lands, and with the proceeds paid his father's debts. This left him poverty-stricken.

Between the young man and Colonel Sayton there was a cold reserve, a tacit declaration of war which was unmistakable.

Colonel Sayton was a proud old man—an unjust old man. He was not exactly mean, nor can we say that he regarded money as the sole guaranty for worth. Yet, remembering the way in which Allan Hill had lost his property, the old gentleman grew extremely serious as the young man—at last entirely disregarding him and his commands—continued his visits to Sadie. Then the father hinted to his daughter that the young fellow's visits were distasteful to him.

But, this time Sadie paid no heed to her father's words. Then the old gentleman got very angry, and peremptorily bade the girl discard her lover.

Then Sadie Sayton's eyes flashed fire, as she openly avowed her undying love for Allan Hill.

Colonel Sayton was almost dumbfounded at this, though he answered not a word; but, when the young man came again, the stern old father met him ere he alighted from his horse.

The words they spoke were few. Colonel Sayton telling Allan, angrily, never again to put foot in his house, until he could keep a bank account. Young Hill retorted that the day would come when the Colonel would welcome him to his proud old mansion.

Then they parted.

The dark night following this altercation, Allan Hill stood on the wharf awaiting the arrival of the "John Sylvester." By his side was Sadie Sayton. He slipped upon her finger a ring with a ruby-setting; she pinned in his shirt-front a diamond scarf-pin.

Then the steamer's lights were in sight. Ten minutes later Allan Hill had parted from the girl he loved, stepped aboard the steamer, and was gone into the world to make that which would enable him—to keep a bank account.

CHAPTER VII.

BY A DEATH-BED.

FRANK HAYWORTH'S heart beat fast as, with Agnes Hope hanging on his arm, he paused at the foot of the rickety stairway to allow the poor girl time to get her breath. The young man heard the labored breathing struggling from the panting bosom; he felt the thin arm dragging so heavily, so tremulously, on his, and he knew that the maiden was exhausted.

So for a moment he lingered at the foot of the stairway, in the gloomy, unlit passage, and supporting the fainting form of the girl in his strong grasp, he waited until she had, in a measure, recovered from her tedious walk through the snow.

As they stood there silently, in the dark passage, no sound breaking the perfect quiet, save the sad, hollow shriekings of the wind, moaning around the corners and under the eaves of the old house, suddenly a faint, half-gurgling groan echoed feebly from the room above. Then again and again. And then a fluttering voice was heard speaking in tremulous tones.

And then the half-subdued, yet heavy footsteps withal of a man shook the room as he walked across the floor.

Agnes Hope rallied herself, and summoning a sudden energy, said, in a low voice:

"Come—come, Frank! We must go! 'Tis mother, and—and—we may be too late. Come!"

The young man strove not to keep her; but he whispered in her ear:

"Again, Agnes, I beg you to be brave, and to remember that I am your friend to death! Now, Agnes, lean on me, and come along. And be prepared, my poor girl, for the worst. There—there—Agnes, do not tremble so; trust in God, and rely on my friendship!"

So speaking, Frank Hayworth, almost lifting the girl in his arms, commenced the ascent of the stairs. In a moment the top was reached.

And that moment the door of the front room was opened, and the robust form of the kind-hearted physician stood there in the broad flash of light streaming from the apartment.

And then another gurgling groan echoed in the silent air.

Agnes Hope trembled as, leaning on the actor's arm, she panted heavily.

"Is it you, Agnes?" asked the doctor, in a low voice, as he peered into the gloom. His voice was subdued—just above a whisper, and, in his tones, there was something of sympathy.

"Yes, doctor," replied the girl; "it is I. I am with Mr. Hayworth." As she spoke she came forward into the light.

"I am glad you are here, Agnes, my child," said the physician in the same kind tone. "Be not cast down, my poor girl, but come in and see your mother. You have no time to lose."

So saying, the humane gentleman took Agnes by the hand, and beckoning the young man to follow, led the girl into the humble room.

A single oil-lamp on the mantelpiece flung its light over the apartment. Feeble as were the rays, they were sufficiently strong to reveal the poverty of the apartment—the curtainless window, the worm-eaten sashes—the damp, moldy walls—the bare floor—the broken chair, and the scanty bed with its meager covering.

On that bed lay a thin-faced, pallid woman, her lips apart, the struggling breath coming and going at long intervals—the thin eyes, almost meaningless and staring, thrown back and fixed, the skinny hands outside the cover digging the skeleton-like fingers into the bedclothes.

Relinquishing the hand of Agnes, the physician stepped lightly to the mantle, and took therefrom a glass containing a fluid. He leaned over the bed of the dying woman, and placed his hands gently upon her arm.

"Arouse, Mrs. Hope, and drink this potion; Agnes is here," and then he lifted her head gently, as he placed the liquid to her lips.

Without hesitating, the sufferer swallowed the invigorating draught.

In a moment the fiery liquid had flashed through her sinking frame—the eyes lost their strong stare—the hands unclenched their grasp, and the panting breath came more regularly.

Turning her eyes wearily on the physician, the dying woman murmured in a low voice, incoherently—unmeaningly:

"Agnes! Agnes! did you say, doctor? No! Agnes is not here; she is at the play-house, laughing and jesting on the boards! She is *Emily St. Evermond*, to-night. And then—ha! ha! She afterward marries *Green Jones*, you know! She told me all about it, and how her heart would ache, when remembering her old mother all alone at home. She would have to go on the stage, and laugh and smirk, and say silly things to please the people! Poor—poor Agnes! But, she is not here, doctor, and—Ha! doctor, I am dying, doctor, and Agnes, my child—away!"

As she spoke a wild shudder swept over her frame, and with a startled look of sudden fright, she closed her eyes.

The physician had allowed her to rattle on in her wild, random talk, without attempting to check; but, as soon as she ceased speaking of her own accord, he quickly placed his sensitive finger over the thrilling artery of the neck. Then, as a painful look spread over his face, he beckoned Agnes to him, and leaning down, half-shouted in the ear of the dying woman:

"Arouse yourself! arouse yourself, for your daughter's sake! Agnes is here to bid you farewell!"

But the poor woman gave no reply. At the name of Agnes there was a faint quivering about the nostril, a just perceptible lifting of the thin upper lip. Then a terrible shiver passed over her frame—then another, and another—then a long, feebly-drawn breath.

The physician turned away.

"DEAD!" he said, in a voice almost inaudible.

Then came the long, wailing shriek, as poor Agnes reeled back, and fell in the ready arms of Frank Hayworth.

At that moment the window-sash was shaken, and a wild laugh rung in the room.

Frank Hayworth glanced thitherward and saw a hideous face.

In an instant the face was gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOMETHING SERIOUS INTERRUPTED.

FOR a moment Wildfern gazed triumphantly at the quarry he had hunted down—the poor girl lying so motionless in the snow.

Then he stooped down and pressed to her nostrils a handkerchief saturated with an ether. Then, calling a passing carriage, he lifted the girl in his arms, bore her to the vehicle, and whispering a few words to the driver, sprung in and away they jolted.

The carriage dashed on as rapidly as possible over the snow-covered streets. The driver plied his whip vigorously—perhaps he knew the man who had employed him, well enough; this man paid well! So

he forced his horses onward through the snow, at a slashing gait.

Wildfern, clutching the form of the swooning girl in his arms, still held the saturated handkerchief over her nostrils.

And Sadie lay like one dead; she did not move, nor did the faintest quiver of eyelid or nostril indicate that life still lingered in the frame.

But the man was satisfied. He was on the road to triumph, so he thought. At all events, he smiled grimly, triumphantly, to himself—there in that jolting carriage—for he felt Sadie Sayton's heart beating wildly against her well-fitting corset. Moreover, he knew the exact strength of the anæsthetic, which he handled so boldly and confidently.

The carriage rumbled on. At length Locust street was reached.

Turning abruptly around the corner, the driver lashed his horses again, and rattled on at a greater speed than ever. Proceeding a few squares, the vehicle suddenly paused before a large double house on the north side. A light burned in the hallway of the dwelling, despite the late hour.

The driver did not stir from his box.

Willis Wildfern reached out his hand and opened the door. Then, grasping the form of Sadie Sayton in his arms, he sprung out.

"Here, my man," he said, handing a note of considerable amount to the driver; "this for your speed. And, mark you well—you know me!—you have only been to the Baltimore depot to-night!"

"Exactly, captain; I know my business."

The man touched his horses, and again the carriage jolted away. Turning into a neighboring cross-street, it was soon out of sight and hearing.

Wildfern, bearing the insensible girl in his arms, sprung up the broad marble steps, and applying his hand to the bell pulled vigorously three times.

Instantly the light glowing in the hall and shimmering through the transom-light over the door, was subdued. Then, hurrying feet echoed along the passage. But, though a hand was placed upon the knob inside, yet the door opened not, nor did the knob turn. A faint, peculiar rap, however, sounded on the panel.

Willis Wildfern immediately answered this. Then another rap sounded on the door. The man's face wrinkled into a frown; but he returned the rap.

At last the door was opened; but even then it was caught by a short check-chain.

"Who comes?" asked a voice.

"It is I, Lady Maud," replied Wildfern, angrily.

"Open at once and let me in out of the storm."

Then the door was closed for a moment; a chain rattled. Then the door swung open.

"Wildfern entered with his burden and glanced around him.

"Ha! what's this, Willis Wildfern? What dark purpose do you now entertain?" asked the woman harshly, though she gave way for the man to enter as she spoke.

The other made a sudden, imperative gesture. The woman understood it, for she half-cowered, and then quickly shut the door.

"Mind your tongue, Lady Maud!" replied Wildfern, angrily, as he drew aside the saturated handkerchief, and let the light fall on the lovely face of the girl. "But, look at this beauty!" he continued.

"Did you ever see one fairer, eh?"

"Wonderfully fair!" exclaimed the woman, involuntarily. "But, where did you find the poor thing, captain, and what are you going to do with the child? I hope—"

"Enough, Lady Maud; but now, come help me in with her. Then, maybe, I'll tell you all about it. You must keep her here for me."

The woman started, but, meeting the man's eye, bowed silently, saying nothing. They passed on, and entered a brilliantly-lit parlor to the left—the man still carrying the girl in his arms. Then he laid her on a sofa. But he did not explain her insensible condition.

He whispered to the other.

"What now, captain?" and she stirred not.

"Do as I tell you—at once, too!" growled the man.

"I tell you, Wildfern, I do not wish—"

"Go, Lady Maud! Do you brave me thus?" and he put his hand menacingly in his bosom.

The woman turned at once and left the room. In a few moments she was back.

She carried in her hands a large silk handkerchief, and a few feet of cord. But, her face was wrinkled darkly.

A moment and the handkerchief was tied loosely though securely over the girl's head. Then her soft wrists were bound with the cord. Between them, at once, the man and the woman bore the limp form along the dimly-lit hall—thence up stairs, out of sight.

Some ten minutes elapsed before the two returned.

Wildfern opened a door to the right of the passage, and entered a room as if he was perfectly at home. The woman followed him.

The apartment into which they entered was fitted up with a tasteful, costly elegance. Full-length mirrors reached from the ceiling to the richly-carpeted floor.

Paintings of wondrous tinting and shading—though perhaps rather broad in subject—adorned the walls. The atmosphere of the room was warm and genial.

"You certainly have comfort here, Lady Maud, thanks to—me!" said the man.

"Thanks to our handy way of providing money, you had better say, my dear captain. And you know I am not altogether unserviceable. If I owe you any thing I endeavor to pay it back by showing that I am grateful. Besides that, captain," and she sunk her voice to a whisper, as a glitter came to her eye, "I

am well aware what a word from me would do! I would have but to breathe a single sentence, in the ear of a certain official about town, and you and Wild Tom would—"

"There! Enough, Lady Maud! you trifle with me—you threaten me, and there's no necessity," interrupted the man, starting. "More than that, my noble lady, if you are inclined, go ahead! You will be cutting your own throat. Ha! ha! And should you fail in doing that, you may as well remember that I am no pigmy, and can do certain things myself!"

These words were spoken fiercely and with a deep significance: and, as he uttered the last syllable, the man thrust his right hand into the breast-pocket of his coat.

The Lady Maud shuddered, and her ruddy face blanched as the words fell upon her ear. But she rallied and said laughingly:

"I did but joke, captain, and if I meant any thing, it was, that I do for you what would be a fair equivalent for the money you advance me. But," and her voice became serious, as if a sudden remembrance had flashed through her brain, "please remember, my friend, that I hold more than one secret of yours! I am not easily frightened, Willis Wildfern, nor am I a child to deal with. I think this much can be matched against yours!" and, as she spoke, she flexed her right arm, and touched the swelling muscle with the tips of the fingers of her left hand.

The man drew back. He knew the Lady Maud of old; he knew that she was not to be trifled with, and that when her anger was thoroughly aroused, she was a dangerous woman to deal with—one who could take her own part, be it at cut-and-thrust or fisticuff.

And Willis Wildfern, as he sat there, was thinking of an old-time scene in a dark room, when knives clashed in the silent air, and the bare boards were slippery with human gore.

He called back to his memory that scene with a shudder, and his bearded face grew white for a moment. But rallying himself he said, as a sickly smile flashed over his face:

"We will not quarrel, Lady Maud! Above all others, you and I should be friends. But, remember well: you hold me no tighter than I hold you—for I saw the blow given that night, late—"

"Ah! And did I not, Willis Wildfern, in this very house, see other blows given? Did I not see a bleeding, ghastly body carried down those stairs there? Ah! well you may shudder! And can not the old covered well in the yard tell a secret? Ay! between you and Wild Tom—"

"Stop, woman, or by heavens, I'll make you!" And as he uttered those angry words in a low, hissing voice, the man sprang to his feet, and drew from his bosom a long, keen knife. In a moment he advanced toward the other.

But the Lady Maud was not slow in meeting his attack. Like lightning she was upon her feet; and then the blue, highly-tempered barrel of a pistol flashed in the room, and the woman's finger was pressing the creaking trigger.

The man paused; then suddenly he stooped for a spring, and—

At that moment the door-bell sounded sharp and clear through the quiet mansion.

CHAPTER IX.

A STARTLING SIGHT.

BUT the hideous face disappeared quickly from the window; and then the snow whirled down furiously against the filmy panes. The wind roared around the old house, and sighed and moaned along the streets, and up the alleys.

Frank Hayworth had started when his eyes fell upon the dark, scowling, diabolical face at the window. And then a frown wrinkled his brow.

A black memory, blacker than the ominous countenance that was pressed against the rattling sash, rushed over him. He remembered well one dark night of storm and lightning, in Fairmount Park he singly stood between a defenseless girl and two swarthy men bent on evil intent; he remembered that, as the lightning glared through the dark glades of the park, his eyes had fallen upon a face, a black face—the face of a very fiend!

And just now, he had seen the same horrible countenance at the window of that lonely house. But, when he looked again, he saw nothing.

Laying the swooning girl gently upon an old lounge, the young man sprang to the window, flung up the rickety sash, and, leaning forth, peered out into the thick gloom.

Far down the street, dimly showing, the form of a man was speeding away. Then it had gone from sight.

Frank Hayworth looked below. He started as he saw the old shutter to a window of a story under him swinging to and fro. In an instant he knew how the bold intruder had clambered up.

The young man lowered the sash at once, and turned again into the room.

The physician, who had been leaning over the girl, now arose, and putting on his overcoat, picked up his hat and gloves. Then he drew near to Frank Hayworth, and said, in an undertone:

"I am of no further use, sir; but, somebody must stay here with the poor girl to-night. How can it be arranged?"

The actor pondered for a moment; but, then looking up suddenly, said, quietly:

"I can arrange it, doctor; I will stay myself."

For an instant the physician glanced at him who spoke; in that glance was something—however faint—of suspicion.

"Can you not get some other person too—a woman—Mr. Hayworth? Agnes Hope is a young girl; and

you two all alone in this old house. Why, people will—"

"I understand you, doctor," interrupted the other, sternly. "Let me assure you, I love Agnes Hope only as—as a sister, and as such would respect and defend her."

Frank Hayworth had hesitated somewhat as he uttered these words; a qualm of conscience half-sickened him, as a catechising question—"Is it true what I am saying?"—flashed through his bosom. But he said nothing else just then.

The shade of suspicion passed from the physician's face, and he answered:

"You have a good heart, Mr. Hayworth, and you will be rewarded! And, now, please attend to the funeral arrangements, at your earliest convenience. We are the only friends the poor girl has, and we must not desert her. And, yes, the funeral had better be as soon as possible."

"Exactly, doctor. To-morrow afternoon, under the circumstances, will not be too soon, I think. What say you?"

"I will do; and I will be here then. And, Mr. Hayworth," the physician sunk his voice still lower as he spoke, "if—if—there is any thing in the shape of money—why, sir, my purse is—"

"God bless you, doctor! I have some means myself, and Agnes has her wages. But, should we need any thing, we will not scruple to take advantage of your kind offer."

"Then, good-night, sir," replied the physician, shaking the actor's hand. "I must now be going; I will see you to-morrow."

Turning at once, the humane gentleman said a soft, sympathizing good-night to Agnes, and in a moment more had disappeared.

Frank Hayworth and Agnes Hope were left alone in the chamber of death.

The young man gazed for a moment at the girl in silence; then, recovering himself, walked to the lounge on which she sat, and taking her hand gently in his, said:

"You must sleep, Agnes; you are wearied and faint. Sit in the chair there for a moment, and I will wheel the lounge into the next room and arrange it for you. Do not object. I can do it, and you must sleep, or you'll be sick yourself. There, sit down," he said, as the girl, after feebly objecting, arose to her feet, and sat down in the chair near the bed.

Frank Hayworth at once pushed the lounge from the chamber into the neighboring room. He was absent but a few moments when he returned softly, and said:

"Tis ready, Agnes; now go in and sleep. I will remain here all night, and watch."

Without replying, but with a look of deep gratitude, Agnes Hope arose, and walked into the next room.

Then Frank Hayworth, his hands behind him, his face serious with thought, began to promenade slowly the limits of the carpetless floor.

The minutes and hours sped by, and still the actor walked this chamber of death. Thought upon thought was flashing through his brain; in his memory he was traveling backward over the broad highway of time—that road at one time strewn with garlands and fringed with wild roses and daisies, loading the happy sunlit air with their ravishing aroma; that way, again, dark and gloomy—swept by fiery storms—the roses withered—the garlands a crisp—and the murky atmosphere heavy with noxious vapors!

The actor paused as a shudder swept over his frame. A feeling of awe, which he could not drive away, crept apace over Frank Hayworth as he paused there, and, bending his head, listened to the wild storm raging without.

Involuntarily he turned and glanced at the ghastly object on the bed.

A look of very horror sprang to his face as he saw what was revealed.

The young man looked again.

Uttering a half-cry of fright, and while his eyes seemed to start from their sockets—his tongue cleaving to his mouth—his forehead bathed in sudden sweat—his face blanched—his nostrils quivering, Frank Hayworth staggered wildly back, and clutching in the air for support, sunk with a moan upon a chair.

CHAPTER X.

AT TONY'S.

WILLIS WILDFERN paused as the startling jingle of the bell rung in the room.

Glaring at the angry woman who stood before him, he placed his knife slowly out of sight, and said:

"It was very well, Lady Maud, that we were interrupted in our little game! Perhaps when we can spare our services to one another, we can take up the battle again; but not now. You are useful to me as I am to you. So put up your pistol, and we'll be friends. But hark you, Lady Maud! please forget old things for the future; it is best for the health of both of us!"

The woman half-sneered, as she replied:

"Be it as you say, Captain Willis! But all I wish you to understand is, that I hold you as tightly by the throat as you do me; and that I am well able and always prepared to defend myself. But, as you say, we'll be friends now. Wait a moment until I answer the bell. Ha! there it is again; and whoever pulls it is in earnest!"

As she spoke, she placed the pistol back in her bosom, and casting a half-suspicious glance at Wildfern, turned abruptly and opened the door leading into the passageway.

The man gazed after with a scowl; but his face

suddenly lighted up with a smile, and he chuckled low to himself, as he muttered:

"I must propitiate the old tigress! For I have game in her keeping! I have a wife in sight! And gold—her gold! It shall pay me in full! Yes, I was born under a lucky star, and—"

Just then the door-bolt turned, and the Lady Maud re-entered the apartment, a frown upon her face.

"You are wanted, captain; trouble is in the wind!" she said, at once, flinging herself into a chair, and glancing at the man she addressed.

Wildfern's face grew white.

"Well, what is it, Lady Maud?"

"The presses are in danger! Wild Tom is at the door; he brings the news."

"The devil! Let him come in, and—"

"Let Wild Tom come in! Are you crazy, Willis Wildfern? I am a match for either of you, singly, but I'll not trust you both together."

The woman spoke very decidedly, as a deep, vindictive fire shot from her eyes.

The man's face grew black with an ominous frown. His eyes sparkled with an angry flash, and he bit his lip. But he was mentally disturbed; he did not like the news just brought. It was clear he understood it, whatever it was. So, as he laughed grimly, he said:

"You are too suspicious, my friend; you do not trust me as far as I do you. Perhaps 'tis the fear of a guilty conscience," and he sneered in her face.

The woman winced; her face paled; but, quickly recovering herself, she said, quietly:

"That is not a matter of argument just now. Even if it was, I fancy Wild Tom's news is of too important a nature to allow us time to wrangle about something or nothing, which may some day, my dear captain, be settled to our mutual satisfaction, in blood!"

The last words were spoken with a sudden vehemence, and the woman waved the man half-fiercely toward the door.

Wildfern did not answer; but turning, he left the room, and hastened to the front door. He was gone several minutes.

When he returned, his face was wrinkled into a fresh frown of vexation, and an anxious expression shone in his every feature.

"I must be gone, Lady Maud, and at once," he said, hurriedly; "Tom's intelligence is important; the 'office' must be moved, and to-night. Confound the bad luck! I thought if there was a safe place in Philadelphia, we had found it."

"Where now will you go, captain?" asked the woman.

"To our same old place, I suppose: the vault at Laurel Hill. That is safe at all events; but it is inconveniently far, and Tom dislikes the place. He is superstitious, and is fond of seeing a ghost or bogle about every other night in the week! But I'll keep him up to the work, or I'll cut his throat!"

"Exactly, captain; that must be the alternative, for Wild Tom knows some dark tales of you," and the woman smiled.

The man made no reply; he busied himself in putting on his overcoat. Then, taking his hat, he said:

"Take good care of the girl up-stairs, Lady Maud. If she escapes, by heaven! I'll—but no matter! You know me. Let me whisper in your ear: that girl is to be my wife! Do you understand? And you are to help me. I'll tell you all as soon as I can. Of course you know that a roll of a few hundred dollars comes in handy at times—eh?"

"Ay! and whenever I wish it, my dear captain! And without such questionable work as this last!" and the woman smiled scornfully.

"I do not contradict you," replied the other, quickly; "but I will report to you soon. And now, good-night, and don't forget what I told you, if you value your health!"

Another moment, and, in company with a tall, gigantic negro, he was hurrying away toward Shippen street. Here they paused and glanced around them in every direction. Not a human being was in sight. The lusty guardians of the night were nowhere to be seen. Perhaps they had retreated before the storm, and were warming their chilled hands, against rules, in some neighboring groggery or restaurant?

"The coast is clear, Tom," said Wildfern, in a low voice. "We'll go to Tony's and change. Then we can have a talk and arrange matters. I tell you, Tom, we must work to-night! and, if necessary, with edged tools!"

"Exactly, marse cap'n! I understands you, and I'm willing!"

"Well, then, come along; the night is passing, and such a night!"

So saying he hurried across the street, and, turning, proceeded up Shippen for some distance. At length the men paused before a low house, with a gloomy, dingy exterior. Not a light was visible, and from this fact, and the silent, deserted look it bore, it was fair to surmise that the dwelling was untenanted.

But, Willis Wildfern thought otherwise; for, glancing around him, he suddenly stopped, and brushed away the snow at his feet, until he came to some boards. It was the cellar-cap.

The man knelt down at once and placed his ear to a crevice in the planking. He smiled with a grim satisfaction as he arose to his feet.

He had heard sounds coming from the cellar.

"Tony is well patronized to-night, Tom; listen," said Wildfern.

Sure enough, in the lulls of the wind faint sounds of tinkling tumblers, and swell of songs and boisterous laughter could be heard.

And the negro smiled, too, as he said in reply:

"Yes, cap'n, I hears 'em! 'Tis all the better for us, if Tony has a large house. But, what if some of

dem meddlesome policemen is down dar by the store!"

The other started and hesitated. The suggestion set him to thinking. He paused for a moment.

"You know, marse cap'n, we're known to most on 'em in our *working-gear*; and you knows, too, we can't go in dat cellar dressed in any thing else."

"You're right, Tom," said Wildfern, slowly. "But, we *must* go in there and fix our plans, for we can not go elsewhere at this time of night. So, come along. If worst comes—why, Tom, we've been in scrapes before. We'll trust to luck and muscle! Come!"

"All right, marse cap'n; go ahead; I can 'weed my row,' dat's sure!"

Wildfern again looked around him; but, as he saw no one, he turned at once and disappeared up a narrow alley, leading between the two adjoining houses.

The negro followed close behind him. Cautiously they felt their way along the cold, wet walls bordering the narrow passage. Then they stood in an open space—a small yard now covered with snow.

Wildfern, who seemed perfectly at home, did not pause, but crossing over to a back-building, rapped on a door.

His rap was a peculiar one. At first it awakened no response; but, on being repeated, the door was opened softly, and a pair of keen black eyes flashed out on those who knocked.

The light from within the room shone through the crevice made by opening the door, and revealed those who stood without. Then the door was opened wider, and a small, short, thick-set fellow, with jet-black hair and glittering eyes appeared.

"Ah! 'tis ze *capitaine*! I am very much please to see him. *Entrez, entrez, capitaine!*" and he gave way for the two to pass.

"Yes, Tony, 'tis I. Glad to see you. But, Tony, show us to my room—my comrade and I. Then we'll go down to the 'palace,'" and Wildfern, followed by Tom, pushed through the door into the more congenial atmosphere of indoors.

Antoine, or Tony, as he was known, with a bow led his guests through the well-lighted room—first seeing, however, that the door was secured.

The light streaming down revealed Tom, the gigantic negro, fully.

His dress did not correspond with the rude, unpolished language which fell from his lips. Broadcloth of the costliest kind covered his stalwart person, as could be seen; for he had thrown aside his overcoat. Warm, fleece-lined, neatly-fitting gloves incased his hands, and a hat of the latest fashion sat on his large, matted head. A heavy gold guard dangled from the button-hole of his vest, and in the bosom of his spotless shirt-front sparkled a stone.

Physically speaking, the man was a noble specimen of his species. As tall as was Willis Wildfern, still, when he stood beside the swarthy negro, the former looked absolutely dwarfish.

But, there was something in the face of this giant which marred the splendor of his towering form. Perhaps the reader will learn the defect before the last page of this veracious narrative is completed.

In a moment, however, they had passed through the room, and, still escorted by Tony, disappeared in the apartment beyond.

Several moments passed ere they came forth again; and when they did no one would have known them—at least, the white man.

They hurried, however, through the room which they had entered, and going on into a passage, disappeared down a dark stairway.

The "palace" of Tony, so called by Wildfern, was not a palace, as we would interpret the word. Far from it. It was nothing more than "groggery." A long counter, and back of it a flashing array of cheap glassware, with a background of dingy solferino paper, made that mythical temple—the bar. At this shrine stood at least a score of rough fellows, in every stage of dilapidation—some quaffing the four-penny glasses of liquor there dispensed; others bent over the counter, and asleep; others leaning against it for support.

The room seemed like a baker's oven; and, to add to the stench of the prevailing atmosphere, a dozen or so half-drunken creatures, seated around the red-hot stove, were regaling themselves with the pipe.

Willis Wildfern paid no heed to any one, but, followed by his stalwart companion, strode through the motley crowd to a table in a further corner of the room. He sat down; his comrade did the same. Then Wildfern rapped loudly on the table. In a moment Tony, who had now come down to superintend affairs, was at the table.

"What will ze *capitaine* have?"

"Sh! sh! Tony. Be guarded. No 'captain' here," and Wildfern looked him sternly in the face.

"Ten thousand pardons, *monsieur le capi*—I mean, sir."

"Very good, Tony; don't forget. But, bring me brandy; and, hark you, my man, *good* brandy, or I'll make you drink it."

"Certainly—*certainement, cap*—sir! You are very droll! Ha! ha!" and with this the man hurried off.

He was gone but a few minutes when he returned, bringing the desired liquid.

"Here it is, sir; real Portuguese—*vraiment!*"

The man, Wildfern, took the bottle, and without placing any credit in Tony's words, took out the cork, and passed the vessel knowingly, backward and forward, beneath his nose for a moment.

"Good, Tony; for once you are right. Here's the score." As he spoke he drew from his pocket a bank-note and flung it upon the table.

The Frenchman picked up the money and glanced suspiciously at it.

"Good, Tony; good as gold."

"Yes, yes, cap—sir! If you say so."

"I do say so; and, Tony, keep the change," said Wildfern, as a satisfied look came over his face.

Then Tony hurried away again.

Pouring out a huge draught, Wildfern gulped it down without breathing; and then, with an approving smack of his lips, he shoved the bottle toward the other.

The negro helped himself bountifully likewise.

"Now, Tom, tell me all about this bad piece of business," said Wildfern; "it has annoyed me no little."

"Yes, sir. Well, you see, sir, as I was coming out of the 'office' I see'd a policeman hanging around the place. I tried to git away but the fellow had his eye upon me. Den he was soon up by me, and he said: 'Do you live in dat house, my man?' I said no; den he said dat he would—Hollo! what de debbil is dat?" suddenly exclaimed the negro, as the tramping of many feet was heard.

Then came a crash at the door, Wildfern and Tom sprung to their feet.

CHAPTER XI.

A REVELATION.

WELL might Frank Hayworth shrink and cower with affright. The sight which met his gaze was one fitted to strike terror to his soul.

On the bed, sitting up and leaning upon her elbow—her eyes staring wildly around her—her shrunken, angular, death-struck face showing like a specter's in the pale light—her mouth contorted into a half-grimace—was the widow Hope! She whom the physician, an hour before, had pronounced *dead*!

There she sat, and her dim eyes, now glaring with a fixed stare, were fastened upon the young man. But, she did not speak.

Slowly Frank Hayworth recovered his scattered senses; then he drew near the bedside of the woman, whom all had thought was already wandering in spirit through the misty shadow-land.

He paused; but the woman made a gesture for him to draw nearer. He obeyed. Then she pointed feebly to a vial on the table by the bedside. The young man brought it to her, and at another sign placed it to her lips.

The old woman drank greedily, half-emptying the vial; then sunk back slowly upon the pillow. She lay perfectly still with her eyes shut.

Frank Hayworth, scarcely knowing what to do, looked wonderingly on. He seemed to be in a dream. But, all at once bestirring himself, he turned from the bed, and was about to hurry into the room where Agnes was sleeping.

The old woman, however, unclosed her eyes.

"Stop, Frank Hayworth!" she said in a faint, hollow voice. "Do not awaken Agnes; let the poor girl sleep on. Come hither, young man. My sands are fast running away; the potent draught has given me artificial life. Come, sit near me—I will tell you a tale, and intrust you with a commission. Hurry, for time is ebbing; and with me, whose feet are even now on the boundaries of another world, time is everything. How chilly I am! The draught! Quick, Frank, the draught!"

Again the actor placed the vial to the lips of the dying woman; again she clutched it and drank eagerly of the life-sustaining liquid.

Once more the effect was apparent; for the old woman drew a long breath, and reaching out, grasped the young man with her cold, almost pulseless hand, and drew him down to a seat beside the bed.

"Had I not better call Agnes, Mrs. Hope? She sleeps just there, and—"

"No, Frank Hayworth; what I have to say must be briefly told, for life is going fast. Agnes, too, would be shocked, for she thinks I am already dead, and with her the worst is over. Let her sleep on. Now, listen, Frank, and, as I know you to be a man of honor and truth, promise me as far as you are able, to see that my dying wishes are observed."

She paused, and for a moment breathed heavily. Closing her eyes, she remained perfectly quiet for several minutes.

The young man took her gently by her thin hand—so cold, yet so damp and so grave-like! He spoke not a word, but waited for the poor woman to say what was upon her mind.

Frank Hayworth, though his brain fairly reeled, and the pulses of his heart were thrilling wildly through his system, still controlled himself—still held the cold hand in his, and awaited the words to come forth from the pale, bloodless lips.

Suddenly a tremor passed over the woman's frame. She opened her eyes, and then once more reached out for the vial. Again it was placed to her lips. This time she drained it to the bottom, and casting it, empty, aside, she said, in a voice preternaturally strong:

"There! 'Tis gone! every drop! And now I MUST speak. Listen, Frank Hayworth, and listen well; for 'tis my last chance. Do not interrupt me by word or sign; if I fail now, the opportunity will be gone forever, and the sad secret of my bosom will die with me. I was not born, young man, in the poverty which you now see around me; far from it! I was the spoiled, pampered child of fortune; I had every thing with which to gratify the wishes of my heart. An elegant home, fond parents, wealth in abundance, gay society—I had all! And I had something else, young man! Something more fatal, unless rightly appreciated, than the poison of asps! I had beauty, wondrous, fascinating, captivating beauty. Ah, Frank Hayworth, no wonder you start and gaze at me—an old, dying woman, with hollow eyes and a thin, pinched face! But, forty years ago, I was beautiful! Oh, that the virgin splendor with which, alas, I was endowed, had been denied me!"

The old woman paused; her breath was coming

and going rapidly; and, strange to say, an unnatural fire gleamed in her eyes, and a small, round, red spot glowed like a living coal upon each wan, faded cheek.

Frank Hayworth said not a word, but, by a single pressure of the hand, he let the poor old creature know that he was heeding well her words.

"I was rich, well-educated and handsome. It can not be wondered, then, that suitors flocked around me; they came by scores. But, one by one, I turned them off. At length, however, there came one to whom my young heart went out. He was a handsome man, almost God-like in his lofty deportment. He was well-to-do, and possessed a broad, liberal mind, cultivated to the highest degree. But, with this, he had an oily deceitful tongue! That tongue and my beauty—for he loved me for my beauty—destroyed me! 'Tis an old tale, and one soon told! I loved him too well, and not with wisdom.

"I ran away one wild night, and was secretly married to him! *Married?* Ah, yes! We returned; and on our way home I fancied I saw a shade of regret and alarm in my husband's manner. And then a sudden, black suspicion flashed through my mind! But I chased it away. I went to my father—explaining my absence the best way I could. I went hither, for my husband said that, for a time, he wished our marriage kept secret! Oh! fool that I was! And yet, how I loved that man!

"Time passed on, and then another hideous trouble came upon me. You know to what I refer. Well, this could not be concealed from my mother and father. They upbraided me, and then my father, on his knees, besought me to tell him the man who had dishonored him. I held my peace, for I had promised *him* to say nothing of our marriage; and I knew a day would come when I could prove my purity and innocence. Then my father swore a fierce oath, and bade me in sternest language to tell him the name of my lover.

"Still, I answered not a word; I *could not* betray the man I loved, though death was staring me in the face! Then, with a storm in his bosom, and a fierce anathema on his lips, my father clutched me by the arm, and leading me from the parental roof, hurled me out into the bleak street! Oh, God! the memory of that dark, wild night haunts me still! But, I was true to the man I loved—true to my husband, alas!

"I wandered forth into the deserted streets, which, that night, were like it is to-night, swept by driving gusts. I roamed the unfrequented by-ways of this great city all that night; and when the dawn broke, I sat down upon the steps of a lordly mansion. I knew not where I was. As I sat there, the door suddenly opened, and who should come forth but the *man I loved*! He was arrayed for a gunning expedition. I sprung to my feet, and clung around him. In a few words I told him my tale, and begged him to claim me as his wife—to remove the stigma from my name; but, instead of sympathizing with me, he gazed at me sternly, and then, with a mocking laugh, told me that I had been 'very imprudent!' But, I still clung to him. I would not thus let him go. A dark frown came over his face; for, at that moment, an open buggy drove up. In it sat a young man. And then, before I knew it, this man—this false lover of mine—flung me rudely aside, and bounding down the steps, sprung into the vehicle and dashed off.

"Then I knew that I had been deceived—that the marriage was in all probability a sham—a villainous ruse. I slowly arose and tottered away—anywhere, I cared not—so that I was moving! Suddenly, my father's aristocratic mansion towered before me. Instinctively I paused and turned toward the old familiar home; my heart yearned for it. In a moment, despite the early hour, I was on the steps and had rung the bell with a nervous hand. The door was soon opened, and my father, stern, indignant and repelling, stood there. He gave me one glance of withering scorn, and then hurled the door to. I distinctly heard the lock turn in the bolt, and my father's heavy steps receding down the hall. *I was disowned!* Oh, God! stand by me now!"

For several moments the poor old woman paused; she seemed to be husbanding her strength, and endeavoring to freshen her memory.

But, at the pressure of Frank Hayworth's hand, she rallied:

"Well, young man," she continued, in a voice perceptibly weaker than before, "time passed on. I found lodgings in a low quarter of the city, and managed to earn a scanty livelihood with my needle. Only once after that did I look upon the face of my parents. That occasion was one Saturday afternoon, when sick in body and weary in soul, I crept forth, disguised in an old shawl and bonnet, and, with a small basket of apples, took my way to Broad street. I knew the air would do me good, and I took the apples that the time might not go unprofitably by; I thought I could make a few pennies as I sat there, and watched the gay equipages pass. It was near sunset, when I suddenly saw, coming in from the country, a large open carriage with a liveried coachman and double team. I knew it at a glance, long before I saw my mother and father sitting on the rear seats. I shrunk away, and drew my faded calico sunbonnet over my face more closely. Then, as the carriage was abreast of me, I heard my father bid the coachman stop. I scarcely breathed. In a moment the coachman descended from his seat, and coming up to me, said the gentleman in the carriage wished some apples. I tremblingly gave him the basket, not daring to look up. My father leisurely purchased some of the fruit, and sent me a piece of silver. I was about to return the necessary change when I heard my mother telling me to keep it all. And as the carriage rolled away I heard my father

mutter something about 'poor woman!' I never saw them again. My mother—died—in—a—month—from—that time. I cannot tell you the life I led then. I often saw him who had been my ruin; but he never recognized me—never sought me, his victim, to give me alms! But, the *trying time* of my life was fast approaching. You know what was that time. I determined to make one desperate effort in behalf of that unborn innocent, and you can understand the object of such an effort. I sought out the man I still loved; I dogged his steps whithersoever he went. I gave him no peace. At last, on the condition that I would swear never more to bother him with my presence—that I would not reveal his name as connected with my child—that I would raise no hindrance to any future marriages he might make, he consented to become my lawful husband before God and man.

"So, one dark night I met him by appointment at a stage-office on Second street, and we journeyed away together to a distant village in the interior. And there we were united in the bonds of wedlock by a minister, with a witness present. That minister, whom I well knew, and the witness, are dead long ago! But, I have the certificate safe yet! I have, too, the piece of silver my father gave me for the apples; 'tis around my neck. There let it remain. . . . Agnes was born! I took the name I now bear, and have never been ashamed of it. The man who blighted all my hopes of life is likewise dead; he died fifteen years ago, a widower. *He married again, not many months after he had deceived me!* But, I knew it not. Oh, God! But his wife—one of the belles of Philadelphia—did not live long. A son was left, the wicked monster he is! Nay, Frank Hayworth, start not, and do not interrupt me; I have but little else to say, and but a few moments left me in which to say it. Agnes is now nearly twenty-four, and she knows not a word of her history. *That son* is twenty-three. Now, young man, search in that trunk—the old one—yonder by the wall; look in the tray and you will find a paper. Bring it here."

The actor arose to his feet, and approaching the trunk, knelt down before it. He was earnest and serious, and he knew there was no time to be lost. In a moment he returned, bringing a folded yellow sheet of paper.

"Read it, Frank Hayworth," said the poor woman, in a low breath.

The actor opened it, and glanced over it. He started wildly and staggered to his feet.

"My God! *His father!*" and reeling back, he sunk forward over the bed.

"Ay! *his father*, Frank Hayworth. Now, listen to the request of a dying woman—of one whose spirit part will soon stand in the presence of the Great Judge. Guard that paper well, and *when the time comes give it to Agnes*, and tell her gently the tale I have told you. My father, *her grandfather*, is still living; he is a very old man, and can not, in nature, last much longer! *He has no living relative of any degree, save Agnes; she is his grandchild, his own flesh and blood.* The old man is very wealthy. His property must descend to Agnes; and that certificate of marriage will secure it to her. Now you will know *when* to give that paper to my child. Will you not be her friend, Frank Hayworth? Will you not protect her from that monster, who unnaturally seeks her ruin? Ay! I know you will, and—Ha! I am growing cold! I am—dying! I—I—am. Farewe—l—l—my—poor—"

A rattle sounded in the throat of the dying woman; a convulsive tremor passed over her frame; then a long, sighing expiration fled out from the collapsed lungs, and the poor woman was dead!

Frank Hayworth placed the yellow, faded sheet carefully in his bosom, and kneeling beside the bed, bent his head reverentially in the presence of the dead, and prayed silently to Him who robs the grave of its victory.

And then, a soft hand was suddenly laid upon his shoulder.

CHAPTER XII.

HAND TO HAND.

WILLIS WILDFERN glared around him like a tiger at bay, as the door of the cellar to the rear was suddenly hauled open, and a half-dozen policemen sprang in.

In an instant all was confusion. Tony suddenly emerged from behind the bar, and uttering a peculiar cry, darted up the secret stairway leading to the house above. The half-drunken wretches lying over the counter, and scattered around upon the bare floor, staggered to their feet and attempted to escape. But the brawny policemen barred their way, and advanced, batons in hand, upon them.

Wildfern leaned over and whispered a word in the negro's ear. Tom did not start; he simply drew himself up, and baring his stalwart arms, said, in a low tone:

"I'll never be taken by dat *white trash*, cap'n! And the fust one dat gits in reach of dis *baby's head*," shaking his ponderous fist, "will get hurt; dat's all!"

"I'll stand by you, Tom; for we are in a scrape," said Wildfern, in a deep, half-tremulous voice, at the same time thrusting his hand into his bosom, and drawing partly therefrom a long knife.

"Give me fair play, cap'n, and I'll clean out de cellar in five minutes! Let 'em come on!" said the black, his lip now and then twitching nervously, and his red eyes lighting up wickedly.

The policemen were men of nerve and brain; they had made descents upon such houses before, and were prepared for emergencies of any nature soever. They did not hesitate, but continued to advance upon the motley horde, who now, with desperate front, had shrunk away to the further side of the cellar.

Suddenly one of the officers cast his eyes toward our two acquaintances.

"Ha! boys!" he exclaimed, triumphantly, "we have bagged the *old rat*, at last! Onto him, my men. Five hundred dollars is the reward for him! Now, my black beauty, we have met at last!"

As the policeman spoke, he clutched his club more firmly, and without awaiting for the others, sprang forward.

But Wild Tom did not quail; he did not turn to fly, as Willis Wildfern had done. He simply reared himself, until his gigantic stature towered so high that his bushy head almost touched the ceiling of the cellar. Then throwing himself in an attitude of defense, he raised his ponderous fist, until the swelling muscles, under the old coat sleeve, seemed as if they would burst through.

"Stop dar, whar you is, Mr. Brass-buttons! or you'll git a cold dat's past curing! Stand back, I say, white man! I ain't what people thinks me. I never harmed you, and you sha'n't put your hands on me! Stand back, or I'll smash your head into a jelly! and I can do it!"

The policeman—himself a very Hercules in mold, and a lion in courage—hesitated for a moment; but it was not through fear.

"Give up, you black villain, at once!" he said. "Be a little wise, my pretty fellow; for I shall not leave this cellar until I have clutched you with the bracelets!" and he advanced again.

The negro did not move an inch. His face was now doubly dark with passion, and his bloodshot eyes glared with a glittering, snake-like glare.

"Den come on and take me! When dem irons is on my wrists, *somebody 'll be dead*—dat's all! Now come along; I'm waiting. And I think dat I'll clean out dis room quick enough to suit you!"

The words were scarcely out of the man's mouth, when at a bound, the stalwart policeman, without waiting longer, bowed his head and dashed forward.

The shock was fearful; for it was man to man—muscle to muscle—brawn to brawn!

The movement of the officer was like lightning; for in the twinkling of an eye, his heavy grip was fast upon the negro's throat, and his whole weight was, at the same time, pressing him back.

The others held off; no one interfered. But all, from mere interest and excitement, watched the contest which had been inaugurated between these two giants.

Slowly the policeman followed up his advantage—the negro giving back doggedly, inch by inch, his own heavy hand clutching the officer by the shoulder. But, as yet, he made no decided effort, simply opposing his weight to the other.

Then, all at once, the policeman thrust his hand in his overcoat pocket for the manacles, which he carried with him. The pieces of steel jingled as they struck against each other.

In the twinkling of an eye, the negro paused in his retreat, and by one powerful effort of strength, wrenched the other's grasp from his throat, and instantly gripped the officer by the neck with his left hand. Then the brawny right arm was drawn back, the weighty fist swung over the black bushy head; and then, with a whiz, that fist shot out, straight from the shoulder, through the air.

A dull, sickening thud sounded on the close, still air; and then another. Releasing his hold, the negro grasped the policeman with both hands around the waist, and by a wondrous display of strength, raised him from the floor, and flung him, as a bolt from a catapult, into the little band of his companions.

Without waiting to see the effect of this bold movement, the negro raised a wild shout of triumph, and bidding his own backers on, dashed forward to the fight. The half-drunken creatures, raised to a high pitch of excitement, and now frenzied with anger, followed.

Willis Wildfern could not keep back; he was hurried along with the surging combatants, and in a moment was in the midst of the fray.

An instant later and the contending parties came together.

The policemen were not dismayed. Hitherto they had not resorted to firearms; but now as the infuriated fiends, headed by the gigantic black, bore down upon them, a pistol-barrel gleamed in the hands of one of them.

The lights were suddenly extinguished, and a fearful scene was inaugurated. Then the sharp ring of a pistol rung in the low room—then the sickening thud of falling blows, and the clicking clash of knives in contact.

The fight was desperate, but the odds were fearful. Fighting gallantly to the last, the policemen were driven backward, and then up-stairs. Then they hastily retreated, defeated but not dismayed, through the dark alley into the street.

When they returned at dawn, with reinforcements, the old house was deserted, the furniture had disappeared, as if by magic, and on the floor of the cellar, stark in death—his face battered out of shape—a venomous knife-thrust in his throat, lay the gallant policeman.

CHAPTER XIII.

A HEART TALE.

FRANK HAYWORTH, as he felt that touch upon his shoulder, slowly raised his head and glanced behind him. Although he suspected who it was, he could not help starting violently, as his gaze fell upon the pale, haggard face of Agnes Hope.

"I heard you talking, Frank, and I could not stay away," said the girl, in a low, sweet voice. "I have come to share with you your vigils."

As she spoke she sat down in a chair near him, her eyes all the time bent with a warm, confiding gleam, upon his face.

The young man arose slowly to his feet; he was trembling in every limb. Then his gaze fell scrutinizingly upon the girl's wan, pallid face. His eyes rested there for a moment. But as a look of satisfaction passed over his features, he said:

"Agnes, you did not hear the words I used?" and he watched her eagerly for the answer.

The girl did not hesitate, but answered promptly:

"No, Frank; but I thought that—that—you were praying for the repose of my dead mother's soul," and she bowed her head as unbidden tears forced themselves through the vein-marked lids, and fell on the coarse coverlet of the bed.

Frank Hayworth did not turn his head away to conceal the emotion which showed in his own face, but, taking the girl's hand gently in his, he said, in a low tone:

"I was praying, Agnes."

He spoke the truth; but not all.

The young man rejoiced in his heart that Agnes had not heard the dark tale, which had fallen from the lips of her mother, whom the poor girl thought long since dead.

There was a silence for several moments; the actor still holding in his, the thin, cold hand of the girl. And Agnes did not attempt to withdraw that hand; for despite the presence of ghastly death—despite the stark, stiffening form of her dead mother lying before her, so quiet—so awful—the girl was happy, and a joyous sensation was tingling through her system.

Her hand was touching Frank Hayworth's! And down deep in her sorely-tried virgin's bosom, Agnes Hope loved the actor with a maiden's unsullied, yearning devotion.

Her hand gently returned the pressure of the man's stalwart grasp.

Frank Hayworth started as he felt the warming, tightening clasp of that soft hand. His face crimsoned, a violent twitching wrinkled his forehead, and he half-dropped the poor supplicating hand.

The girl instantly withdrew her fingers from his grasp, and shrunk timorously away.

But, no word was spoken.

The actor keenly felt his position, and he almost cursed the train of unlucky circumstances which had thus placed him. He *knew* that Agnes Hope loved him—loved him—not wantonly, oh, God, no! but trustingly, it may be blindly—yet with her whole heart.

He dared not forget his old-time vows—he dared not encourage that girl's confiding affection. He could not forget another! At that moment, in mental vision, he plainly saw the warm, beauteous face of Sadie Sayton, shining with a dead-white luster, as she stood by his side that dark night on the wharf, overhanging the rushing river-torrent.

No! no! He must not think of Agnes Hope!

And yet, his brain reeled suddenly, as he recalled the dark tale, told him this very night, by her who had been mother to the beautiful, pale-faced, warm-hearted girl, who now sat before him in that lonely death-chamber.

Agnes Hope was of good family, and was heiress to one of the most princely fortunes in the city!

Frank Hayworth paused as this reflection came over him like an avalanche.

And he had heard the tale—and he had heard the solemn words—and he held in his possession the faded sheet, which in certain and easily-comprehended circumstances, would secure to Agnes Hope, the orphan—the poverty-stricken daughter of misery—vast piles of money and long lists of property—if the pealing words of a woman, over whom flapped the black wings of death, were true!

And he, Frank Hayworth, the actor—the exile—was poor!

Again the man's brain reeled as the tempter came in such luminous shape.

But, though the struggle was severe, it was scarcely more than momentary.

Frank Hayworth was true to Agnes Hope—was faithful to the memory of Sadie Sayton, and did not forget himself!

As the decision was reached, a quiet, peaceful, holy calm pervaded his soul, and a grateful incense burned on the altar of his heart.

And, when the smoke of that incense cleared away, the resplendent image of Sadie Sayton sat enthroned in his bosom, an undisputed queen.

Yet, no word was spoken, and no sound broke the silence of the quiet death-chamber, save the sighings of the winter wind, wailing around the rickety dwelling, and forcing themselves through the creaking sash-joints.

But, at length, the actor looked up, and, in a voice barely audible, said:

"You had better retire, Agnes, to the other room; you need sleep. You have undergone much, and you must take good care of yourself," and he gazed kindly at her.

"And you, Frank; you, too, need repose. Go within yourself, and sleep. I will sit up, in your place. I am not afraid of her, dead, who, when living, loved me so tenderly. Alas! that I should live to see such an hour!"

"Be comforted; be of good cheer, Agnes. You have friends yet. But, indeed, you had better go now; you will need strength for the day which is rapidly coming."

He spoke very earnestly.

The girl shook her head sadly, but decidedly, as she replied:

"No, Frank; I have already slept an hour. I can not close my eyes again to-night; and if you will not go and lie down yourself, I will sit up and watch with you."

The young man could say nothing more; he simply bowed his head in acquiescence.

And there they sat, silent and thinking.

The coarse coverlet was drawn over the shrunken form on the bed, shutting out to a certain extent the dread presence. The seconds and minutes flew by; then an hour.

Agnes sat like a statue, staring before her, her dark eyes fixed—her thin, white hands crossed upon her lap—motionless.

Frank Hayworth's head leaned to one side—then on his breast. Then his hands sunk gradually down; and wearied and at last worn out, a deep slumber crept over the young man, and he slept.

Hideous dreams, ghostly phantoms filled his brain, and passed in long, spectral array before him. Now and then he started, and a half-smile escaped him. But he still slept on.

How long he slumbered he knew not; but he was suddenly awakened by a soft, hot hand, laid gently upon his brow.

That hand was smoothing back the dark, clustering hair, which had fallen over the actor's brow.

The young man started; in a moment he was awake. He glanced around him, and instantly took in his position. But his face first crimsoned, then paled as his eyes fell on Agnes Hope, who had drawn her chair close to his.

There was no mistaking the import of the luster burning in the girl's eyes; there was no mistaking the meaning—told so plainly—in the quivering lip, and the heaving bosom.

And the girl did not shrink away.

"Well, Agnes?" said the young man, almost before he knew *what* he was saying.

Agnes did not reply; but her waxen cheeks flushed faintly, and she covered her face with her hands, and wept.

"What is it, Agnes?" asked the young man, in a low, trembling voice.

The girl still did not answer; but she slowly raised her tear-bedewed face, and looked at him straight and unflinchingly.

Frank Hayworth almost shuddered at what he seemed to dread as a horrid revelation; but he did not speak.

"God forgive me, Frank," began Agnes, in a voice just above a whisper; "and you, too, Frank, forgive me if what I say to you, in this lonely chamber, tenanted by death, is wrong and unmaidenly. I have struggled against the mad impulse prompting me to speak! I have *prayed* against it; but in vain! I *must* speak, or I would die! And, Frank, I know you too well—your generous heart—your high regard for truth, your noble scorn for all that is false and low! I know that, come what may, I can trust to your honor, Frank. Nay, nay, Frank, do not interrupt me, for I tell you, I *must* unburden my heart to you, or I would die! Frank," and her voice was more subdued than ever, and her head was slightly bowed, "we have not, it is true, known each other for years; but we have been together now long enough for us to be acquainted with the faults and follies, or the good traits, of one another. I am, Frank, what you see me—a poor outcast, a beggar, a puppet of fortune—a waif blown hither and thrown thither by every varying wind. But I feel, Frank—for something within me says so, in a voice louder than trumpets—that I was born for better things! I feel myself superior to the situation—far above the circumstances in which you see me. Frank, we have been drawn very closely together of late; we have stood side by side; we have touched hands! I have felt your eyes glow warm upon me, and—oh—God! my heart has gone out to you! For Heaven's sake, Frank, speak not! Let *me* say on. I am all alone now in the world—no one to whom to look—no one with whom to advise, and, oh, God! Frank, I can not be separated from you—for—for—I love you!" and she bowed her head upon her thin hands, through the slender fingers of which the tears forced their way, and dropped upon the bare floor.

Suddenly she looked up, and, in a wild, enthusiastic tone, continued:

"We are both young, Frank; you have already won your way into the world's favor, and a bright and successful career is before you. I, too, *can* be successful; I feel it! Oh, Frank, with my hand in yours, I could walk peacefully over the broad road of life; for that road would be covered with roses and beauteous wild flowers; and the bending skies would smile upon us, and a perennial reign of unalloyed bliss would be ours! Oh, darling, say that your heart beats in unison with mine—say that we *can* link hands, hearts and fortunes together! Say, darling, that down in your pure and noble heart, you love me!" and in an irrepressible moment, the poor girl arose to her feet, and flung her arms around the strong man's neck.

We can not describe the emotions which at that time rioted in Frank Hayworth's bosom; nor shall we attempt to do so.

A terrible shudder passed over his frame; then his bosom was filled with thickening clouds, and then a wild storm swept like wind through his thinking being; then, oh God! the enthroned image of Sadie Sayton grew dim! It tottered, reeled and—

No, it did not fall!

Frank Hayworth's whole manhood came to his relief; he was himself—the noble, unspotted gentleman—again; his buckler was untarnished—his high, godlike honor unstained!

Slowly, gently, he unlocked the thin arms clasped around his neck—tenderly he placed the maiden in a chair; and then taking her hand in his, he said, in a voice deadened with emotion, yet distinct withal, in that quiet chamber of death:

"This can not be, Agnes! for God, 'who doeth all things well,' has pronounced against it. Listen,

listen, poor Agnes! Listen to a tale I will tell you, and then judge me."

Closer he drew his chair to hers—more tightly he clasped the trembling hand in his. And then Frank Hayworth told Agnes Hope the tale.

Hours passed; and then the heart-story was finished.

Then the two—the man and the maiden—knelt humbly by the bedside, on which reigned solemn death.

They arose to their feet. One glance between them, and the man leaned down, and imprinting a kiss upon the smooth brow of the maiden, said, in a sweet voice, full of rich music:

"I greet thee, my *sister*!"

And Agnes murmured:

"And I, thee, my brother! God has so willed it!"

And then the rosy dawn glinted its purple light through the broken panes, and shone cheerily in the death-chamber.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISSING.

THE long, stormy winter night had passed, the day broke, and the glad sunlight shone over the face of the snow-covered earth. The clouds had blown themselves away, and the air, though keen and frosty, was clear and brilliant.

The pavements were covered deep with the glittering drapery of the ice-king, the car-tracks were blocked, and huge drifts of the driven snow were piled all along the southern exposure of the streets running east and west.

But the rising sun brought with it no consolation for poor Fanny, the colored maid of Sadie Sayton. The girl's eyes were red with weeping, and her face so wan and haggard after a wakeful night, wore a brooding, anxious expression.

Soon after Sadie had left her room in the hotel on the night before, the colored girl had dropped cosily into an arm-chair, and in her own rude way set herself to thinking; and then, before Fanny knew it, she had slid very naturally into a half-dozed, then into a sound sleep. The girl was soon in the land of dreams. She slumbered on and was only awakened by the hoarse shouting of firemen, and the jingling of their clamorous bells, as a company dashed by toward the scene of some conflagration.

Fanny sat up in the chair, and rubbed her eyes. Then she started and glanced at the clock which was ticking so loudly on the wall. Then the girl cast her eyes toward the bed.

That bed was smooth and unrumpled.

Fanny sprang to her feet. Sadie had not returned, and the hands on the clock pointed to half-past twelve.

Up and down the room strode the girl, now and then—in fact almost momentarily—pausing and bending her ear, when she thought she had at last caught the welcome sound of steps, which she knew so well. But then, the steps passed on *by* the door of the chamber, and died away gradually in another direction. And then a look of disappointment crept over the sable face of the anxious servant.

Thus the time wore on, and still Sadie Sayton came not. Fanny would have gone out in the storm in search of her missing young mistress; but she was afraid—not of the storm itself—but that she would get lost. Then, too, her mistress might return at any moment.

And all night long, from the time she had been awakened by the fire-bells, Fanny walked up and down the room anxiously—fearingly.

The day dawned—the sun arose, and still the girl strode up and down the apartment, listening as ever intently for the coming footsteps of her mistress, which would bring contentment and rest to her wearied, troubled soul.

And Sadie had not yet come.

The breakfast hour at the hotel rolled around, and at the proper time Fanny descended. But the affectionate creature could not partake of what had been prepared. She was thinking of her mistress, and of her unaccountable absence. She did not, however, speak of her troubles or anxiety to any one, but returned to Sadie's room sad and down-hearted as ever.

The sun arose gradually in the heavens, and the day was speeding away. Eleven o'clock rolled around.

Still Sadie Sayton had not returned; still Fanny, the colored girl, walked the room by turns, and gazed anxiously from the window. But the well-known form of her, so dear to her, did not appear.

Suddenly the girl paused in her restless promenade; a thought had struck her.

It was now a bright, clear day, and now, too, there was no danger of being lost. She would go out and search for her mistress, and inquire after her.

Alas! The poor girl did not realize what a large city spread around her, swallowed her up as it were; she could not comprehend but that *some one* must have seen "Miss Sadie," and could give her tidings of the absent one!

The girl lost no time in putting her newly-awakened thought into the shape of a resolve, and then this resolve into speedy execution.

She was soon arrayed for outside weather. Then carefully locking the door, she left word with a maid on that floor, to tell Miss Sayton, in case she returned soon, that the key was with the clerk. Then she hurried down-stairs, thence through the long hall, out into the cold, busy street, along which cutters were dashing and sleigh-bells jingling.

The girl was at first bewildered; but, after standing still for a moment, recovered herself, and joining the throng walked up Chestnut street. At every female figure which she passed, she gave a quick, scrutinizing glance; but she did not stop.

Suddenly, however, as she reached the corner of Twelfth and Chestnut, she paused as if shot.

Her gaze was bent upon the tall form of a man just ahead of her. He was hurrying across the street to the opposite—that is, the north side.

With starting eyes and mouth ajar, the girl riveted her stare upon the gentleman. But it was evident *he* had not seen her; for without looking around, he reached the other side of Chestnut street, turned directly up, and hastening on, entered the Chestnut Street Theater.

It was the hour for rehearsal.

Fanny gazed at the door in which she had seen the gentleman enter, at least ten minutes after he had disappeared from view. Then shaking her head sagely, she turned away and said:

"If dat man warn't Marse Allan Hill, den I'm blind! dat's all! He was in a mons'ous big hurry anyway, to git in dat big house over dar. Wonder if Miss Sadie knows he's here by dis time? Wonder, too, if Marse Allan knows anything 'bout Miss Sadie?"

Well, he's done gone now, and I must look 'round for dat poor gal! Well, well! who'd ever a-thought dat dis—"

The rest of Fanny's soliloquy was lost as she turned at once into the great throng surging along. And then the untutored creature began to ask almost every one she met if they had seen anything of "Miss Sadie."

Thus engaged we will leave the girl, and go to others who claim our attention.

Agnes Hope had been left all alone by Frank Hayworth that morning; but, before leaving, the young man had procured a good breakfast for the orphan girl and himself.

Agnes was not afraid to remain alone in the old house.

Then in due time the solemn-visaged undertaker sent by the actor, had come, and with his assistants, silently made his arrangements. Then he had gone and returned again with a wagon containing the neat but plain coffin.

And still Agnes was without friend or consoler in the house of death. The actor was compelled to be absent; he had a great deal to attend to. And, after he had seen the undertaker, and left full directions with him, he had hurried on to the theater to be ready at rehearsal; also to inform the management that poor Agnes could not, that night, play the *role* of *Emily St. Evermond*, and to give the reason therefor.

This was his errand, when Fanny saw him and watched him so eagerly at Twelfth and Chestnut, and—strange to say, called him by another name—one with which, to a certain extent, the reader has become acquainted.

As soon as the actor was free from his duties at the theater, he had hurried away back to the humble abode on Catharine street.

The day wore itself slowly away; four o'clock came and the solemn hearse drew up in front of the lonely dwelling on that humble thoroughfare of "down-town." Behind came a single carriage. In that vehicle was a minister.

Then the good doctor's carriage drew up. In a few moments all were within the house.

Then a last view was taken of the pinched face of the dead woman lying so calm, so still in the coffin; then the lid was screwed down—then the coffin solemnly borne forth and placed in the hearse waiting for it.

Agnes, leaning on Frank Hayworth's arm, walked firmly down, and entered the carriage. The minister and then the young actor, followed; and in a moment the little procession was in slow progress.

The cemetery—Laurel Hill—was reached, a few words were spoken, in a solemn, hushed tone, by the minister, and then the remains were lowered to their last resting-place.

And then the carriage was turned toward home. And what a home now for Agnes Hope!

As they were leaving the gate, two men passed by; one was a gigantic black, the other a white man. Frank Hayworth started slightly as he saw them.

But then the carriage rattled away.

* * * Late that evening, Willis Wildfern strolled into the office of a morning paper. In a moment or so he came forth, and sauntered down-town. He finally reached Locust. Up this street he turned.

That night Frank Hayworth was quite tame as *Hawkshaw*; and the part of the giddy Emily S. Evermond was *not* played by Agnes Hope, the orphan.

CHAPTER XV.

LOOKING FOR TRAILS.

THAT same night when to everybody's surprise Frank Hayworth played the part of *Hawkshaw* so tamely—in fact, so tamely that, failing to make use of certain points, he was *hissed* by the audience—just as soon as the play was over, the actor hurried out from the theater, and took his way rapidly down Twelfth street.

He paused for nothing. He was thinking of Agnes Hope, all alone in that dreary, desolate house on Catharine street—he was thinking of the wintriness, the despairing gloom of her soul! He was thinking of the heart-trials that poor girl had undergone—he was thinking of that trying scene between him and her, when the almost broken-hearted orphan maid had learned beyond a peradventure that between herself and Frank Hayworth a mighty mountain reared itself—that a wide gulf, deep and black, was stretching before her, far away to an unbroken shore.

And the actor was thinking, too, of that wild, despairing look that blazed from the large, lustrous eyes of Agnes Hope—of the fires which so soon faded from those eyes. Then he thought of the silent prayer to God for help and strength—then of the

holy quiet overspreading the soul—then of the newly-forged link, so binding and so tender, which, as brother and sister, joined him and Agnes together.

All this, and more, was filling the young man's bosom. He strode on through the cold, cutting wind. But he paused not once.

Under such circumstances it was not a matter of wonder that he had failed to render his part in the play so entirely without pith and point, as, despite his popularity, to call down hisses, and to elicit from the stage-manager the curt advice, to be more careful at the next performance.

The truth is—and the reader can readily infer it—Frank Hayworth was not himself. We cannot blame him that he heeded neither the condemning hisses nor the manager's practical admonition! His mind was filled with other, more sympathizing, higher thoughts; and on this night, down in his soul, he cared for nothing save, that through some instrumentality, he might be able to console the sorrowing heart of Agnes Hope, the orphan.

It was now nearly midnight, and the scanty moon, which in the earlier part of the evening had flung its wan light over the great city covered by its sheeny drapery, had sunk behind the steel-blue horizon.

Frank Hayworth was now web down in the lower part of the city. The lamps were becoming more sparse, the way more desolate and drear.

And then he heard naught but his footsteps crunching the snow along some stretch of neglected pavement. But he had often trod the way before, and at all times of night—trod it when there was desolation in his heart, a gloomy pall stretching between him and the future, that future of which he could not tell.

He had trod this way, and others, when there was a blank in his soul, when almost without a penny in his pocket—homeless and famished—he had strolled hither, wandered thither, dreaming of Sadie, nourishing her image in his heart, and thinking of the time, which then seemed so far off, when he could keep a bank account!

So the young man heeded not the swart shadows lying around him, heeded not the desolation of the spot through which he was striding; for blacker shadows than these were flinging their gloom over his heart, and a desolation far sterner and ominous than that around him, was settling over him.

He hurried on. He was near his point of destination, and a thrill of pleasure shot through his system as he knew that in a few moments, he could, by his presence, cheer away the clouds overhanging Agnes Hope, and bring a ray of sunshine to the orphan's face.

Suddenly, however, he halted. He had reached an open lot, or rather a lot made open by the burning, long since, of a house. The broken, jagged, blackened walls of that destroyed house, standing here and there in the gray gloom, looked weird and grotesque enough.

But Frank Hayworth had not paused to scan the ruins by the gray gleam of a moonless winter night.

He had seen two figures flitting on ahead of him several times. These figures had all at once disappeared in the gloom and amid the ruins of the old house.

This movement looked suspicious. Frank Hayworth paused, and felt anxiously in his pockets.

"We will return for a while—some hours at least—and follow the fortunes of Fanny."

It may be remembered that we left the poor girl wandering up and down Chestnut street. At first the negress was bewildered, as she was swept along almost against her will, by the flux and reflux of the thronging crowds. The sight was an unusual one for Fanny. The rich dresses, the seemingly countless multitude, the jingling of sleigh-bells, the shouts of hilarious laughter, the fascinating shop-windows—all contributed to make the girl feel foolish and nonplused.

But this spirit died away; for Fanny was sick at heart, and she had gone out upon another errand than to look around her or to be mystified. She was seeking her beloved mistress. So she set to work at once making inquiries.

At first people were inclined to laugh at the poor, simple-hearted creature, but when they marked how earnest were her words, and when they saw tears standing in the girl's eyes, they spoke kindly to her.

All day long Fanny wandered about. Several times she had been completely lost, but was soon set right again. She did not return to the hotel to dinner, but kept up her search, and continued to ask all she met if they had seen or heard anything of "Miss Sadie."

And then the day was drawing to a close, and the shadows in the street were lengthened and distorted.

And Fanny's search had been fruitless.

Slowly the poor girl turned herself about, and with tears in her eyes, and sadness in her heart, commenced to retrace her steps toward the hotel.

As she passed a policeman, who stood on the corner of a street, she paused. A new idea had struck her. She would speak to him and get his advice.

She told the officer all her trouble, and then asked his assistance. The policeman looked very grave and serious when he heard the strange tale told him. At first he did not answer, but scrutinized the girl's face searchingly. It was evident he did not at first believe her statement; or perhaps he thought that she was crazed; and he bade her tell the story again, watching her keenly all the time, to detect some flaw, some inconsistency. But Fanny did not blunder; she told the same tale again, and, as before, her tears flowed profusely. She begged the policeman piteously to help her friend, her "Miss Sadie."

The officer questioned her closely and rapidly for

a few moments—learned how long she had been in the city—gained an inkling of the object of her visit, found out about Sadie going to the theater, and her failure to return to the hotel. Then he paused in his questioning, and pondered for several moments. Looking up, however, he bade the girl return to the hotel, and not to go out, and that he would see that proper search was made for her mistress.

Fanny hurried home at once, but as yet she had not acquainted those at the hotel with the absence of Sadie.

Late that evening when the officer was relieved at his post, he hastened down Chestnut street, and called at the theater. The lamps were just lit in front of the play-house.

The officer waited impatiently a few moments. Then the doors were opened. Upon inquiring he learned nothing more than what the reader already knows. The box-agent told him that a young lady answering to the description, as given by the officer—he having received the same minutely from Fanny—had purchased an orchestra seat late the previous evening, just a moment before the curtain had gone up. Further than that he knew nothing; perhaps the watchman could tell him.

After waiting awhile that individual appeared.

He had seen a girl lying, half-supported, in a man's arms, in the lobby, after the theater was out. Who the man was he could not say. He might know him should he see him again, and—he might not. But he stated that when he returned that night from hauling the fires, and extinguishing the lights, the girl had disappeared, and the man was standing on the pavement.

This was all the officer could learn at the theater; and he then hastened away to the St. Lawrence Hotel. Thence he bent his steps toward the Central Station House.

Before eight o'clock that night a special detail of detectives were quietly scattering about in the great city, in search of Sadie Sayton.

When the policeman had stood that evening in the Chestnut street theater, and spoke with the night-watchman, he had not noticed that a tall man for an instant paused in the shade of one of the large lamps, and glared at the two.

Nor had he heard the low, satisfied chuckle of the tall man, as he rubbed his hands together and walked away.

That man was Willis Wildfern; he had just parted, in a low quarter of Juniper street, from a gigantic black. And as he walked on, he muttered to himself.

In a few moments he had handed an advertisement, in a disguised hand-writing, to one of the clerks in the office of a morning paper.

And Willis Wildfern, with a contented shrug, paid in advance for the advertisement.

Still poor Fanny walked the room in the hotel; but as yet she had heard no welcoming footstep, and despair was fast unnerving her.

CHAPTER XVI.

"A FAIR EXCHANGE IS NO ROBBERY."

FRANK HAYWORTH uttered an exclamation of vexation, as he finished his vain search through his pockets. He had no weapon about him, not even a pen-knife; nor did he have a cane. He was entirely defenseless.

He peered sharply ahead at the gloomy spot where he had seen the two men disappear in the black shadow of the ruined house. Then he glanced behind him. No one was in sight in either direction, back or front. The darkness to the rear was ominous; that in front, more so still. But, behind him the lights ended in a more brilliant perspective than in front; for in the latter case the scattered gas-lamps stretched away into absolute darkness. In fact they did not extend many squares below Catharine street.

The young man was not far from this thoroughfare; one block more and he would have been there.

Frank Hayworth was not a coward; his courage had been put to the test in other places and under other circumstances.

But this was a lonely place, and he had noticed that the two men had kept persistently ahead of him, ever since he had crossed Locust street. He was unarmed, too, and he was convinced—for he seemed to feel it—that those late prowlers had their eyes upon him, and meant him no especial good.

This was annoying; he was anxious to get to Catharine street, to the lodgings of poor Agnes, that he might speak to her words of comfort and friendship. He did not wish to turn back; for he fancied that, whoever they were watching him, they knew of his errand—that this espionage over his movements might have some connection with Agnes, who was all alone in the dreary, desolate house in this disreputable quarter of the city. He feared that if he turned back Agnes might be exposed to some wicked attempts of those who would harm her.

This reflection determined him upon his course of action; he would not leave the poor girl thus exposed. He knew of a certain party in the city, who on more occasions than one had persecuted her, and he knew something of a promise and an oath!

He determined to go on at all hazards. And on the morrow, however much talk it might create, he intended, if the girl consented, to remove Agnes to the boarding-house in which he himself had lodgings. She could there be under his protection.

Buttoning his overcoat around him, the young man keeping his eyes well about him, strode forward along the lonely way.

He reached the gloomy shade of the old burnt walls, hanging threateningly over the street, and as yet he had seen no more of the two figures, who had disappeared just there.

Do what he could, Frank Hayworth trembled

slightly, as, at last, he stood full in the black shadow; and then he quickened his pace. He was almost clear of the place—his feet were upon the next sidewalk—when in the twinkling of an eye, two forms dashed out silently from behind a low, scathed wall, and advanced upon him.

Before the actor could speak, their intention was evident.

The young man paused and retreated rapidly; but one of those attacking rushed boldly on him.

Then suddenly Frank Hayworth again paused, and as the waylayer dashed forward, he met him with a heavy blow in the face. Nothing human could stand up under that vengeful stroke, and the man went down like an ox.

But before the actor could follow up his advantage, the other, a perfect giant in stature, rushed upon him and dealt him a stunning blow with his clinched fist.

The stroke fell with a fearful thud. Without a groan or a cry, the actor sunk on the snow-covered walkway.

In an instant the Herculean fellow was above him—his red eyes burning down upon the dead-white face of the prostrate man—his hands in his pockets. In a moment, he had rudely torn open the overcoat, and was about searching the vest-pockets, when suddenly a faint sparkle as from a stone glittered in his eyes. With a low chuckle, the man stooped, unfastened the small diamond-pin, and was about transferring it to his own pockets, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"Give me the jewel, my good fellow; I want it as evidence. Besides, I will balance it in gold, and you can keep what else you may find."

Thus spoke a voice in a low tone at the other's elbow.

The words came from him who had fallen before Frank Hayworth's first and only blow.

The gigantic fellow hesitated for a moment.

"All right, of course. Anything to 'commodate you,'" and he handed the stone to the other.

This man quickly placed it in his vest-pocket, and then said:

"Come, we must be off—Pshaw! never mind him; he'll come to. So don't look scared. Now, hurry to the rendezvous; to-night we must move. I'll meet you at half-past one."

"All right; I am off," said the man, turning at once; and he hurried back up Twelfth street.

Then he who had received the diamond stood still for a moment and gazed about him.

"All right!" he muttered. "Two birds with one stone! Ay! And, yes, the coast is clear. Now, my pretty one, we will see if certain memories—old time pledges, hold good with you! We'll see, too, if a mark can be made! Something! anything to make up for the other failure!"

So saying he hurried away toward Catharine street.

And Frank Hayworth lay quiet—apparently lifeless, in the chilling snow.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE HANDS OF THE PHILISTINES.

* * * AGNES HOPE walked uneasily up and down the limits of the room, in which we have seen her. A deep shade of anxious thought was upon her face, and her eyes glanced furtively, flaringly, around her. Anon she would pause, and bend her ear, as some chance sound echoed in the quiet room.

But again, with a sad shake of the head, she would resume her restless promenade; and then the anxious, yearning expression deepened to one of downright fear.

The girl halted and glanced timidly around her. Her gaze fell upon the bed. Despite her efforts she shuddered and started back.

The bed was now neatly arranged; the white sheets were scrupulous in their appearance, and so folded down as to cover the largest rent in the old threadbare coverlet.

But Agnes remembered well the scene of the night before; however tight she might close her eyes, there on that bed she could see the shrunken form, the pallid death-dewed features, and hollow eyes of her poor old mother—the one who had loved her so affectionately, so devotedly, since the dawn of her recollection.

And that mother was gone now; her wan, yet always welcoming face was hidden beneath a coffin-lid away down under the overlying snow and the frozen mold of the quiet Laurel Hill.

Agnes felt her loneliness keenly; she missed the kindly company of her invalid mother; she missed the dim eye flashing forth its faint, but earnest welcome; she missed the tremulous words of greeting, the warm embrace of a mother's love.

Silently she gazed at the bed; and as she looked, the expression of fear and shrinking passed slowly away. A soft, subdued quiet stole over her pale features—tears bedimmed her large, black eyes, and with a gurgling sob, which she strove to repress, the orphan girl sunk down upon her knees—her face buried in the faded, time-worn coverlet.

Long she knelt there without sign or motion, in the awe-inspiring silence of the lonely chamber.

Agnes Hope was praying!

Suddenly a neighboring clock sounded on the quiet air. Its echoes flooded the lonely room, and startled the ears of the orphan maiden.

The girl started and raised her face—that face wet with tears; then she slowly arose to her feet.

Though her eyes were red, and her face wet with her falling tears, and marked with lines of agony and suffering which had torn her bosom; yet the expression resting on the sad countenance now, was sweet and resigned, like unto that of a spotless vestal.

The girl's prayer had been answered; she had sought and found,

"Surcease of Sorrow."

The echoing clock-bell vibrated in the room, and its solemn quaver recalled the girl to her lonely, cheerless situation.

"Eleven o'clock!" she muttered. "Thank God for it! For—Frank will soon be here, and I believe I *could* die if I had to stay here all alone! The play will soon be over, and Frank promised to come as soon as the curtain was down. What would people say—the great, idle, gossiping world—God be thanked that *our* world is not large—if it were known that Frank Hayworth and myself stayed alone in this old house to-night!"

The pure, guileless maiden started as she asked herself the question, and for an instant a spreading blush crimsoned her cheeks. But this passed off almost at once, as she murmured:

"Let them talk—those who may! God, the searcher of all hearts, knows where dwells *real* innocence. And yet—"

She paused again, and once more the carnation tint bloomed on her thin, white cheeks.

"No! no! no!" she muttered, "I *must* cease to—love Frank Hayworth, other than as a sister! for I have so promised him! I cannot—will not break that promise! Yet, oh! God! the agony! Is it not better that I—I—*should die*, than live thus?" she suddenly exclaimed. "Certainly in the grave there is oblivion, a balm for all earthly love! Is *there*? Is it not rather that 'After death the judgment?' No, no! away unworthy thought! I will live yet and be a sister to him. I will be happy in aiding *him* to be happy."

She paused, and turning about, began to walk the limits of the room again, her fair face sweet and resigned, her head with its raven hair bowed upon the heaving bosom.

Up and down she strode.

Some time passed. Still Agnes Hope, with thoughtful step, walked the uncarpeted floor of her poverty-stricken home.

A half-hour went by—then three quarters; and the dreary midnight was fast approaching.

At length Agnes paused.

"Frank is—late to-night," she muttered. "Can he have forgotten his promise? Has he simply promised, indeed, that he may thus get away from me—say good-by to me? Has—has—oh, God! has Frank forsaken me? No! no! I wrong him. Something has delayed him. Can any harm have befallen him? My God! I shudder! The way is lonely—the night dark and cold, and few are abroad. Good heavens! Suppose that—"

At that moment there was a cautious rattle at the door down-stairs. Then the rattle was more decided; and then the door gave way. In a moment heavy, hurried footsteps echoed in the narrow hall beneath—then upon the creaking stair-case.

"Thank God!" and a blush came to her face as she spoke; "he has come at last! Ha! I forgot I had locked my door. I am coming, Frank!" and she bounded forward and opened the door.

A man strode in; and Agnes Hope, glancing quickly at him, uttered a wild, heart-rending cry and reeled back in the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

We will return a short while, in the running time of our story, to bring before the reader the many events which have crowded upon us.

It will be remembered that early this same evening, we left Lady Maud on a dark, mysterious errand, standing startled and frightened, in the snow-covered yard beside an old well, as she suddenly heard the bell ring loudly in the hall.

Recollecting this it will not be difficult to follow the thread of the story on, and see what followed.

The woman stood still for a moment and glanced wildly around her. She seemed to be undecided what to do. She trembled—partly with cold, partly with fear—and still stirred not.

Again, however, the bell jingled—this time louder than before, as if he who pulled it was impatient.

But the Lady Maud moved not a muscle. After a short interval the bell sounded again with a terrific clangor.

"Perdition seize the man!" muttered the woman, between her teeth, as a malicious oath broke from her lips. "It is *he*! and I can not say nay. I must let him in, or—there'll be trouble. Ha! confound him! again!"

She waited no longer, for the bell had now rung for the fourth time. She stooped suddenly, and with a vigorous effort hauled back the boards over the mouth of the well, shutting out from human gaze the black secret within.

Then drawing the slide over the light, she cast the lantern aside, hurried into the hall, closed the door, and then stood still for a moment. In an instant she had collected herself, and casting aside the covering which she had flung over her shoulders, she hastened down the passage to the front door.

The bell-wire was again creaking as she placed her hand upon the knob. In a moment the bar was removed, the door unlocked; then it was opened, though the check-chain was in its place.

A man outside impatiently attempted to push in, but the chain held the door firmly. He desisted, and turning to another man, a perfect Hercules in stature, who stood at the bottom of the steps, he said:

"Now, hurry, Tom; I'll meet you at the 'Spades,' in Juniper street. Expect me."

The man Tom waited no longer, but strode off at once up the street, and was soon out of sight.

The other again approached the door.

"Now, let me in, Lady Maud!" he exclaimed, in a low, hoarse voice. "I'm half frozen!"

Then the door was opened, and the man entered.

"Why the deuce did you not answer the bell sooner?" he asked, roughly, as soon as the door was well closed, and he glanced threateningly at the woman.

"Why—why, captain, I didn't hear you at first—I—was asleep," replied the other.

"Asleep! Why, my dear Lady Maud, you surely forget the hour! 'Tis only—Ha!" he exclaimed, as just then the light flashed accidentally in the woman's face, showing the pale and haggard features. "You have lied, Lady Maud! You have not been asleep—you have been looking down the well again! Hark you, my friend, you must stop that interesting pastime; you might get talkative."

The woman made no reply at once; but then, after a moment's hesitation, she answered, humbly:

"I could not help it, Willis. Something seemed to impel me to look—to look at it—and I went! . . . 'Tis—'tis there now! Oh, God!"

The man himself shuddered as Lady Maud uttered the last words in a low, frightened whisper, but he made no reply.

In a moment the two had disappeared in the parlor, closing the door.

* * * * * We dare say that by this time the reader is anxious to learn something of poor Sadie Sayton. Save indirectly, we have not referred to her for some time.

When last the reader saw her she was being borne helpless and unresisting up-stairs by Wildfern and the Lady Maud. Since then we have told nothing of her.

We will now return to the poor girl, the victim of such a peculiar concatenation of devilish—that is a good word—circumstances.

Those who bore her unconscious form between them paused not until they reached the landing at the top of the second flight of stairs. Here they stopped a moment for breath. But in a moment more they hurried on again, this time turning sharply to the left and going down a dim-lit passage-way.

Then they halted before a door. The woman, inserting her hand in her bosom, drew out a key and quickly unlocked the door.

The two at once entered a magnificently furnished room and placed the senseless form of the poor girl upon a bed. They then lowered the gas, which was burning in the soft-tinted, rose-colored globes. They then unbound the slender wrists and loosening the handkerchief which was over her head, silently withdrew from the room, and locked the door behind them.

An hour passed—then another.

And all this time the unfortunate girl had remained motionless, and, it seemed, scarcely breathing. But at last a quick, fitting shiver passed over her frame; by a sudden movement she sat up on her elbow, and then, with a low cry, she tore the handkerchief from her head and gazed around her.

At first she could not realize her position; she only remembered seeing a strange girl lying in a tall man's arms, and her subsequent swooning in the snow.

She sprang from the bed, as suddenly her soul was filled with horror, and rushed to the door. It was locked! Then she glanced around her like a tigress.

There were no windows to the room—no outlet save the door now locked.

A horrible suspicion flashed over the poor girl; her eyes seemed to start from her head. She glanced at her hand. The much-prized ring was absent still! Then the whole evening, with its list of startling events, rushed over her like an avalanche.

Again she tried the door, but it yielded not. Then she raised her voice in a long, wild shriek. But no answer came back to her. She heard cautious steps outside; but they passed by the door and then paused.

And then, with despair in her heart, and gloom in her soul, the girl—a prisoner!—tottered back and fell fainting upon the bed.

CHAPTER XIX.

SADIE'S DREAM.

FROM a swoon Sadie Sayton passed gradually and, to herself, imperceptibly into a deep, almost dreamless slumber. We say 'almost,' for it was not until nearly day that a vision passed over her brain.

A fearful vision it was.

Sadie dreamed that she was floating in air over a wild, dark sea. No light in the atmosphere above, no light on the sea below. A terrible silence hung over every thing, and as she hovered in the air, endeavoring to keep herself buoyed up, she could hear nothing but the labored breath coming from her own bosom, and the ceaseless flapping of her wings.

But, despite her efforts, she gradually sunk lower and lower! And then she could dimly see the waters of the glancing, dingy pool, and could hear a weary, dismal sighing and groaning coming up from the dark lake like the wailings of lost souls.

Desperately she fanned the quiet, sultry air with her wings, endeavoring to soar higher and to speed away from the awe-inspiring place. But her efforts were vain. She sunk lower and lower; and then a terrible mephitic odor arose from the lake, and filled her nostrils with an undefinable stench.

A deadening, swooning sensation took possession of her; her wings commenced to grow weary, and her laboring breath came and went with a fearful rapidity.

And now her wings touched the surface of the dark tarn. Then a mighty shudder thrilled her frame as from the shock of a heavily-charged battery; and again with her wings she beat the dead,

like air, in a mad endeavor to rise above the pool. But her wings sunk lower in the shiny waters; and now her feet were in the cold flood!

Just then two dark-winged figures, terrible to look upon—too terrible to describe—darted upon her. As they passed along, just skimming over the pool, they each gave her a downward push and then glanced on.

Like lead she sunk in the chilling waters—her limbs benumbed and helpless, her wings collapsed and drooping.

Down! Down!

The black waters groaned in her ears, and unseen spirits of evil beneath the black waters of the lake were clutching her now in their slimy grasp, and dragging her down slowly—slowly.

Oh, fearful moment! Oh, worse than death!

But just then the leaden gloom above was illumined, as with the brightness of a shining moon, and a white-winged angel appeared, hovering just above her.

Sadie looked, and, with a transport of joy pervading her frame, she beheld in the angel the noble face and form of one so dear to her heart! Sorrowfully he gazed at her for a moment and then folding the long, sweeping wings about him, preparatory to a swoop, he smiled lovingly upon her.

Then, in the twinkling of an eye, the two black-winged forms, which before had flitted by, arose from the surface of the lake and dashed upon the white angel. They met with a resounding shock.

The air was filled with the loud, angry beating of wings, and a terrible conflict was inaugurated.

Still Sadie was sinking; and the cold, black waters broke against her neck, and washed over her head.

And then, like the shifting of a panorama, the air grew brilliant and dazzling as if lit by the splendor of the mid-day sun; and then—

But, with a sudden start, Sadie awoke.

She had felt a cool hand pressing her hot brow, and had heard low words sounding faintly on her ear. She opened her eyes and looked around her.

A faint light was burning in the room, and the girl had just time to catch sight of a female figure disappearing through the door. Then the door was closed with a sudden snap, and the key grated in the lock.

Sadie was again a prisoner.

The poor girl raised herself and glanced around her. She felt invigorated and refreshed, despite the terrible dream which had just agonized her bosom. For a moment she could not tell where she was. She rubbed her temples and gazed around her.

On the hearth was a round patch of brilliant light, shimmering down through the chimney. And the streets without were noisy with the rumble of jolting cars.

Sadie thus knew that the dark night had passed, and that day had come again to gladden the earth. She slowly arose from the bed and tottered to a chair.

We shall not pause to give the varying emotions which flashed in quick succession through the bosom of the girl. She had a deep and well-grounded suspicion as to the motive prompting her close confinement, especially in such a richly-furnished room. Sadie knew the wickedness of the great city in which she was temporarily stopping; perhaps her notions of the dark crimes in Philadelphia were exaggerated.

So there was but little doubt in the girl's mind as to the occasion of her imprisonment; yet she was mystified and confused. And then, at last, she burst into a flood of tears.

Nor did these tears, as is generally the case, give relief. Her fears were of great magnitude, and she had too much at stake for a flood of tears to wash fears and doubts all away.

She thought, too, of Fanny—of the perturbation and terror of that poor girl—of her loneliness, and incapacity to take care of herself in this large city, and she groaned in spirit.

And there she sat!

An hour went by; and then the door was softly opened, and a large tray, containing a substantial breakfast, was shoved into the room.

Sadie sprang to her feet and glanced around. She saw nothing, however, but a hand, which suddenly disappeared.

In a moment the girl was by the door, her hand wrenching at the bolt. But the door was already locked!

With a stifled cry, the maiden reeled back to a chair.

The hours passed by, and the day wore itself away; and the poor girl saw nothing of the bright, glorious weather without, save the small, shifting spot of daylight glimmering down the chimney flue; and she heard nothing, save the jolting cars and the deadened rattle of the lumbering drays, wagons and carriages.

About mid-day, as near as the maiden could judge, the door was again opened, and another tray containing food was half-way protruded; but as he or she who held it saw the contents of the other still untouched, the tray was withdrawn and the door again closed and locked.

This time Sadie paid no heed to the opening and shutting of the door; for she was thinking of her fearful dream—of Allan Hill—of him, too, who had played Hawkshaw—of the tall, bearded, impertinent stranger at the theater—of the sight she had seen through the curtainless window of the old house, and a black cloud of despair was settling over her soul.

Then the glimmer of daylight in the hearth faded slowly; then it was entirely gone.

Sadie gazed fondly at the spot it had occupied, and as it vanished she heaved a deep sigh. She

missed that small patch of sunlight—rather daylight—as she would a friend; for it *had* been her friend—the only link between her and the outside world.

The day was drawing to a close, and the long winter night, with its cold winds and dark shadows was at hand.

Sadie shuddered as she thought what that night might bring forth!

And then at last she arose from her chair, and began to walk the room with a nervous, faltering step; and as she walked she murmured, faintly:

"Oh, God! Can it be he? That voice—that figure—that face! No one else has it. And—and—the diamond pin! And the ringing plaudits! Oh, it is he, and I have found him at last—found him but to lose him! And, alas, I've found another! that monstrous wretch! Heaven support me in this trying hour!" she almost shrieked as she paused in her promenade, and sunk back into the chair again.

"I—I—feel faint and feverish!" she muttered; "and—and—I must eat. Yet I distrust it. But I cannot bear this fearful tax upon me without food. God help me!"

As she spoke she arose and approached the tray, which had rested undisturbed since it was placed within the door that morning. She stooped down and, taking it up, carried it to a table. She partook sparingly of the food, and then she drew back and again began her restless promenade up and down the room.

Again the black thoughts came to her mind—again the hideous dream flashed over her. She could not dislodge that dream. There it was, in her brain, clear, distinct, awful! It rose up constantly before her like a grim phantom—an irrepressible shade.

The rumbling in the streets had, to a great extent, died away, and nothing but an occasional jingle of the car bells echoed faintly in the quiet air of the room.

Fainting, sickened at heart, her pulse throbbing with fever, Sadie Sayton tottered forward and sunk with a groan upon the bed.

At that moment the door was cautiously opened, and a female figure quickly entered. The woman locked the door at once.

Sadie sprang up, and with a wild cry—half of joy, half of appeal—for she thought the hour of deliverance had come, rushed forward and fell, in a suppliant attitude, at the feet of the imperious Lady Maud.

CHAPTER XX.

A PHYSICIAN NEEDED.

WHEN Willis Wildfern and the Lady Maud entered the parlor that night, the former, after drawing a chair close to the cheerful grate, and seating himself, turned at once, and said:

"That's a wondrous bad habit of yours, Lady Maud! You have a way of prying into matters which it were better to let rest," and he gazed at her sternly, as if by the frown on his brow to add force to his words.

By this time the woman had partly recovered from the shock she had recently experienced from the search in the well, and the sudden, and, at that moment, unexpected and unwished-for coming of Wildfern. So she replied, calmly:

"You are hard on me, Captain Willis. That old well contains more than one secret; and hark you, if it were searched and questioned it could tell more than one dark tale! Don't forget that, captain!" and she scowled venomously at him, as she seated herself on the opposite side of the grate.

Willis Wildfern started at first, and an angry cloud grew afresh upon his face; but as he paused for a moment, the cloud disappeared, and a deadly pallor shone even through the heavy beard upon his cheek.

"Pshaw, Lady Maud! You are quick to anger, indeed. What I spoke was more in the way of advice than anything else, and—"

"Then take your advice to yourself, and profit by it!" retorted the woman, interrupting him. "Do you think I will slave myself to death for you, when my fingers at any moment can throttle you, and—"

"There! there! Lady Maud—enough of this! If I have offended you, why consider the provocation; and—and—I beg your pardon, that's all!" said the man, hastily, and though a reddening gleam of anger darted to his face, he smothered his emotions successfully.

"We must not quarrel, Lady Maud," he continued, more calmly; "and you and I know why. So let's be friends."

The woman paused, and then the frown gradually faded from her face, her brow unwrinkled, and she said:

"Very good, captain; I'm willing. But be so kind as to keep a more civil tongue in your head. I am tired of hearing your constant complaints, and seeing a frown on your face whenever you come. I do my best to please you; I can do no more, nor shall I try."

Willis Wildfern made no reply to this. Then several moments passed in silence. But at length the Lady Maud, looking up, said:

"I have looked for you all day, captain; why have you failed to come?"

"The truth is, Lady Maud, I have had my hands full since I left here last evening. You know about the presses and the suspicions of Tom? Well, Tom and myself had a little affair down to Tony's, and the rest of the night we were packing. To-day we have been out at the vault fixing up, and to-night at one o'clock we move. Things are getting ticklish; but one of those meddlesome blue-coats got more than he bargained for, that's certain!" and Wildfern smiled very grimly as he spoke.

"What do you mean, captain?" asked the woman, eying him keenly; "any more blood?"

"Sh! Lady Maud! how soon you jump at conclusions. I meant simply that Tom's muscle was again triumphant. You know that he is brawny."

The woman half-shuddered as these words were spoken with a certain significance; but she made no reply.

Wildfern did not press the question; he simply bowed his head and smiled wickedly. But looking up suddenly, he said:

"And while at the cemetery I saw a funeral, Lady Maud—a very plain one," and he looked at her.

The woman returned his glance, but did not reply; she was awaiting him to go on.

"If I am not wondrously mistaken, I know whose funeral it was," continued Wildfern. "I think the widow Hope is dead."

"The widow Hope! The mother of the girl you once pretended to love—now the pale-faced actress?"

"Pretended? Heed you, Lady Maud," exclaimed the man, angrily, "I once loved Agnes Hope with my whole heart; but let that pass! The old woman died last night about two o'clock. I looked into the death chamber from the street; and Tom tells me he clambered up on the shutter of the lower story, and saw every thing. The widow was buried to-day."

"Then the coast is clear for you, captain—the mark, you know. But do you carry the purpose still? Have you no pity in your heart for the poor girl?"

"Pity? You amuse me, Lady Maud! In such a case as this I know not the meaning of the word! But—" he paused, and then continued: "that fellow Hayworth will be troublesome. He's inclined to meddle; let him look to himself if we come together!" and a dark frown wrinkled the man's bearded face.

"You had better shun this man, captain. I've met him. He looks dangerous."

"I'll watch him, and I am not afraid of him."

"You have Tom to help you, you know, captain," said the woman, with a spice of sarcasm.

The man winced, but did not reply.

Several moments then elapsed before either spoke; and when the silence was broken it was by the Lady Maud, who said, half-musingly:

"The girl's mother—now dead, you say—reminded me forcibly of a maiden once the belle of the city. She had some trouble with somebody. What the trouble, and who the somebody, I don't know; but the girl was disinherited—in fact, turned out of doors. But that is long, long ago, when I myself was—well, it matters not—'tis gone now!" and the woman ended her sentence very abruptly—very singularly.

To all this Wildfern made no reply; he seemed to be thinking. But then he aroused himself and said:

"Time is flying—I must not linger. You and I have work before us to-night—work in which you are interested, Lady Maud. But I must visit that girl. A professional visit if it can be arranged. If there is virtue in bad air—and I know the room where our plunder is kept—the fair creature needs a physician by this time. Go and learn, Lady Maud."

The woman started and gazed keenly at the man, but then she said:

"Yes, captain."

That was all she said, but there was a tone of significance in her manner. She then left the room.

A long time elapsed—how long Wildfern did not exactly know, for he had spent the time in thinking.

The man had been laying some very deep plans, and as he cogitated over them, more than once a frown came to his face. More than once, too, he had uttered an oath—always in connection with two names—names the reader has heard.

The truth is, Willis Wildfern had two friends (?) who were getting troublesome to him. He longed to be free.

His plans were to that end.

But then the Lady Maud returned, and her face was sad, yet stern, when she said, in a low voice:

"The patient indeed needs a physician, captain; but, poor thing—"

"Enough, Lady Maud!" interrupted the man; "I'll go!"

"But, Wildfern, I trust you not! I—"

"Out of my way, woman! I have sworn I would win this obstinate girl for my wife. I'll do it! She has money—the genuine article!" As he spoke he pushed by.

The woman half cowered, and then stood to one side.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GLEAM OF A KNIFE.

LADY MAUD started back and endeavored to shrink away as poor Sadie Sayton fell at her feet, and clasping her arms around her form, moaned out:

"Oh, pity me—pity me! Oh, say that you have come to release me!"

"Why, why, my child, what is the matter? Do not be alarmed," continued the woman, in a milder tone and gentler voice than she had used for years.

"Oh, madam! I want to go away from here. I am dying for air, and—and—I am so wretched!" and as the tears fell from her eyes, she clung to the Lady Maud more closely than ever.

The woman seemed more confused than ever; and then a soft shade grew over her naturally hard countenance. Despite the low light burning in the chandelier, she could see the sad, appealing face of the poor girl distinctly enough to let her know that there was much heart-suffering showing there.

But the Lady Maud answered not a word. There was a storm of wild emotion in her bosom. She was

remembering other and happier days—was she recalling vividly other scenes of the past, when she was a—

But, nonsense! And by an effort she crushed down the thoughts which were rising up and choking her.

When she spoke again her voice was stern and harsh.

"Come, come, none of this nonsense around me, miss! We took you in when—you seemed to be homeless, and when you are well enough you shall go. That's all."

"But—but—my dear madam, I—I—am not sick and—yet—I feel faint!" moaned Sadie, as she suddenly tottered to her feet, and sunk down on the bed.

"Yes; you *are* sick!" said the woman, at the same time drawing near and seating herself by the bed; "and you must keep quiet until the physician comes; he has been sent for."

Sadie groaned and buried her fair face in the pillow.

The Lady Maud glanced at her covertly, and despite the recent change in her features and in her voice, a shade of sorrow—of yearning—lingered on her brow.

But she did not speak.

At length the girl turned her face toward her visitor, and, oh, how sad and touching was that face! She reached out one of her small, round hands, and laid it fearfully, tremblingly, upon one of Lady Maud's.

"I—I—am all alone in this great city," she murmured; "almost alone in the wide world. I have no one to befriend me here. And—and—I know it! I am the victim of some evil-disposed person or persons. Oh, madam, I never dreamed of sin, and—and—you are of my sex! You have a heart in your bosom. Oh, pity me! pity my youth, pity my misfortune, and save—save me from dishonor!"

"Dishonor, child? You speak wildly. What have you to fear here?" and she gazed Sadie in the face, though she started.

The poor maiden answered not; she simply glanced around the room at the warm-tinted paintings hanging on the walls; and then she carried her eyes back to the face of Lady Maud.

Despite all she could do that woman let drop her own gaze, and a half-shudder crept over her frame.

But she quickly rallied, and said in a cold, heartless tone:

"You are prudish, girl; your rearing has been faulty. And—I can not help you!"

"Can not help me!" exclaimed Sadie, vehemently, sitting up on her elbow, her face paling, and her eyes starting from her head. "Oh, then you admit my fears are well-grounded! you admit that I am entrapped, and that I stand in need of help! Oh, God, stand by me!" and she sunk back slowly on the bed again.

Lady Maud turned quickly to her, and laid her hand upon the girl's fair tresses.

"I tell you, my child, be not alarmed. I know your history, at least, partially; I know that you came hither seeking a false lover—nay, do not interrupt me. I know that you now distrust this lover yourself. That man is false to you! He loves another—a poor, beggarly girl—a common thing—one forced to act upon the boards for the bread she eats! You, my child, are young and beautiful; you can do better; you can have a richer suitor if you wish!"

And as she spoke she gazed intently into the fair face, shaded with its shining aureola, before her.

Sadie did not answer; she seemed stupefied, and she lay with her great blue eyes staring meaninglessly at the ceiling. She seemed scarcely to breathe.

Lady Maud still gazed at her, but would not interrupt the trooping thoughts, so dark and hideous, which were rioting through that young bosom.

She watched every quiver of the thin nostril—every twitching of the compressed lips, and she almost held her breath as she awaited the violent emotions to find vent and relief in words.

And Sadie still stared at the ceiling, and gradually the blood flowed away from her cheeks—then from her lips. A deadly pallor stole over her face, and then, as a low, anguished sigh moaned forth from her bosom, the girl's eyes slowly closed; and then, indeed, breathing seemed to cease.

Sadie had swooned.

Lady Maud suddenly arose to her feet, and leaned over her. Then she placed her hand upon her bosom, over the heart.

The woman started.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "is—is—she dead?" and then quickly leaning over, she placed her ear upon the almost pulseless breast.

Eagerly she listened for a moment, and then she raised her head. A smile was on her face—one of satisfaction, almost of joy.

"No! no!" she muttered, "she lives, poor thing, she must have air!" she said.

She stepped immediately to the door, and gently opened it. The cold current swept into the warm, stifling room, rushed over the pallid face, and fanned back the waving, clustering hair.

The Lady Maud returned to the bed, and undid the fastenings around the throat of the poor girl—unbuttoned the tightly-fitting body, and spread open the snowy bosom, that the cool air might have full play.

As the woman placed her hand in the bosom to draw aside the clothing, she started and drew back.

She had dislodged from its hiding-place a small, slender, pearl-handled dagger. Lady Maud took it up, glanced at it, and held it up in the light.

A dark smile—one of triumph—crept over her face, and she quickly unsheathed the bright blade, and gripped the handle more firmly. She bent over the

girl, and gazed down almost gloatingly on the swelling bosom, so splendid—so glorious in its dead-white beauty, showing in the pale light.

"Would it not be well to send this dagger down deep into this stainless bosom? *I know where the heart is!* Then indeed she would be safe from all harm. Poor girl, from my heart I pity her; and I would shield her from this monster! This, *this is the only way!*"

She suddenly drew back the knife, until the bright blade flashed in the light.

CHAPTER XXII.

SIGNS OF MUTINY.

But the woman checked the vengeful yet pitying stroke. She turned her arm slowly aside, and gazed at the girl so helpless—so innocent.

"No, no, poor child! There *may yet be* a bright future for you. I'll leave you this weapon. Oh, my child! see to it that you use it well in your defense! for the tempter comes! *He who would force you to wed him for gold!* Bury it in his heart, and then a righteous retribution will be meted out! Ha! she awakes! I will place the dagger away in its hiding-place, and then be gone. Alas! alas! poor girl! May God watch over you, for now indeed you do need an all-healing physician!"

So saying, she sheathed the slender, glittering blade in its scabbard, and then softly hid it away in the bosom of the still unconscious girl. Then with one more pitying glance at the motionless figure, she hurried from the room, closing and locking the door on the outside. Then her steps died away faintly in the distance.

Wildfern paused as Lady Maud shrunk away, his face grew black, a venomous fire shot from his eyes, and he turned suddenly upon the woman.

"And, my dear Lady Maud, did you speak words of sympathy with this girl?" he demanded, in a low, hissing voice, at the same time advancing a pace toward her.

The Lady Maud was watching him keenly. She retreated a step or so, and placed her hand menacingly in her bosom.

But she answered at once and very composedly:

"Had not my lips been locked up by a fearful oath to you, I would have done so. For never have my hands been fouled with such work! More than that, Willis Wildfern, I would have *torn* her from your grasp, and defied you to your teeth, had not that infernal oath bound me!"

The man reeled back.

A strange change had come over Lady Maud of late, that was certain.

Was she bold in some newly-discovered secret of his, which might prove still more damning to him? or was she well assured that between them, neither had the advantage? Or was she *courting* a rupture—nay, a bloody conflict, the issue of which would terminate the life which she was leading, and which she had admitted was distasteful to her? Or, again, was the Lady Maud—gnawed by the beak of conscience and harassed by the constant presence of trooping shadows—anxious to reform her moral life, to wander back again to the old neglected paths, which, once for her, bloomed with roses, and were lighted by the glad sunlight of happiness and love?

We cannot pause now to answer these questions, or examine into them. This is very certain, the Lady Maud showed not the least fear of Willis Wildfern, and kept him at a proper distance.

As we have stated, the man seemed staggered at the audacity of the woman's words. But he recovered himself as he said, in a firm, half-threatening tone:

"I understand you *well*, Lady Maude; and when this *conquest* is over, and such I swear it shall be, for that woman and her gold I *will* own, why, we will have a little talk, and see if we can not get along better together. But, not now. I have sworn a certain oath about this proud beauty—that I would humble her pride and make her bow to my will, and *I have never left an oath unfulfilled*. Now, Lady Maud, listen to a few words of advice from me. Nay, I *can* and *will* give advice. I know the relations between us as well as you do. I know the tie which binds us together—which *compels* you to be true to me—me to be true to you, and I shall not forget it. *See to it that you do not!* Interfere between me and what I claim as *mine*, and I tell you, Lady Maud, there'll be, between us, *war to the knife!* This house is mine—the money which has furnished it is mine—the right and title to every thing here is mine, and—"

"Ay! and the WELL-SECRET is yours, too, Willis Wildfern! Ha! ha! speak no more, man! and of all things avoid threatening me. I know you; and you know me, *you think!* But I tell you, Willis Wildfern, you dream not of the fire which slumbers within me! There! go now to your 'conquest;' I promise still to be true to you as long as marriage only is your aim. 'Tis enough." And she smiled disdainfully as she threw herself in a chair, and turned her face away.

For a moment Wildfern gazed at her with the look of a fiend. Then, with a scornful laugh, he turned and left the room.

A moment or so his hand was upon the bolt of Sadie's room; but no one would have known him in his auburn hair and whiskers as the dark-bearded Willis Wildfern.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GLITTER OF STEEL.

The door yielded to Wildfern's hand, and in an instant he stood within Sadie's room. For a moment he started and gasped for breath. The air of that room was absolutely poisonous to one like him, who lived so much in the out-door atmosphere.

One greedy, vengeful glance toward the bed on

which lay the unconscious maiden, and he muttered to himself:

"The ventilation is poisonous! It will kill her! Lady Maud should have fixed the damper."

Then he strode hurriedly to the chimney-place. Again he looked toward the bed, but she who lay there still moved not.

In a moment he stooped down, and reaching his hand well up into the flue, suddenly turned the flanges of a damper concealed there. Almost instantly a change was effected in the atmosphere of the room; a half-sullen roar swelled up the chimney, and suddenly Willis Wildfern shivered as he stood in the strong draught.

He smiled with satisfaction to himself as he muttered again:

"By Jove! it works well! But 'tis enough now."

He stooped down, readjusted the damper, and again arose to his feet. Softly he turned toward the bed; in a moment he stood in a foot of the sorrowing girl.

Wildfern's heart beat tumultuously as he stood over the form of Sadie Sayton. Wild commotions were holding a place in his bosom; diabolical dreams were floating through his brain.

"Good heavens!" he muttered; "a very queen! and mine at last!"

In an impulsive moment he leaned over her; the hot breath from his mouth smote her face. Then he laid his hand convulsively upon her round, soft arm.

At that instant a wild shiver crept like lightning through Sadie Sayton's frame; the fleeting color came again to her lips and cheeks, and then her eyes opened.

One glance, and with a piercing shriek, the girl tore herself away from the villain's clutch, and sprung from her bed on the further side. Then, in a moment more, she had fled to the corner of the room, where she hastily cowered down.

Wildfern, though startled at first, quickly recovered himself, and stood composedly gazing at the shrieking maiden.

"Be not alarmed, miss," he said, in a mild, bland voice, in tones, too, entirely different from those he was in the habit of using. "I am sent by the good lady to look after you. She said you were ill—picked up in the snow and so on. I am a physician. Come, come, my dear young lady, and be seated. I will not harm you."

And as he spoke he advanced toward her, as if to lead her to a chair.

In an instant Sadie was upon her feet, her eyes flashing fire, her whole frame dilating with indignation, yet trembling with fear.

"Stand back, sir," she said, in as stern a voice as she could command; "approach me not! You are *no* physician! You are the villain who has entrapped me, and brought me here to work out my ruin! I know the place—oh, God, I know you—I know all!"

Wildfern paused as if shot; a dark, foreboding frown crept to his face, and he gripped his hands viciously together.

"Ha!" he exclaimed in his natural voice, which Sadie at once recognized as that of the man who had watched her so keenly at the theater, at times which, years ago, had sounded in her ears. "Then you are well informed. And, my pretty bird, did the woman give you all this news?" and he gazed her directly in the face.

The girl hesitated a moment; she saw a malicious gleaming in the man's eyes. A sudden thought flashed over her. She was now well assured that she was right in her surmises; but she would not implicate the woman, who, whatever she was, *was* a woman, and one who had spoken a word or so, whether meant or not, which told her that deep down in her bosom she had a woman's sympathizing heart. She would shield this woman from the man's wrath, hoping for better things of her.

So, after this moment of hesitation, Sadie answered, simply:

"I learned what I have said, for myself; and I am now convinced from your conduct, sir, that I was not wrong. Shame on you, sir!" and her eyes flashed forth the scorn which was swelling in her bosom.

But Willis Wildfern only laughed as he carelessly flung himself into a chair.

"Well, well," he said, in a low, insinuating voice, never removing his eyes from the glowing face before him, "granting that you are right in your conjectures, what then? Does *that* release you from this *hospitable* mansion? Ha! ha! my pretty one, you are now where few eyes seldom look. Yet, for all that, you need not be alarmed; in me, my fair miss, you have nothing to fear. Trust me, and all will be well."

"Trust you? Never! Oh, sir! I *beg* you let me go hence; I pray to you! Ay, I will kneel to you! I have an aged father, sir, who dotes on me—whose life is wrapped up in mine. A breath of suspicion against me and he would go down to the grave with his gray hairs dishonored—go down cursing me—cursing the day when I was born to him! Oh, sir, I beg you, for your *mother's* sake, to let me go hence! I'll never breathe a word to living soul of my imprisonment here! I will—"

"Enough! enough! girl!" and his eyes glinted their dark fires as he spoke. "Think you, I could fling away this chance to *win* you? No, no! Do not kneel to me! Consent to be my lawful wife, and a life of happiness awaits you. Refuse, and, by high heavens, you shall die and rot here all alone! I never yield a point, or swerve from a course once marked out!" And he emphasized his last words with an oath.

Sadie Sayton uttered an agonizing cry, and sunk helpless in a chair.

The man said nothing, but looked at the girl as a

fowler watches the game he has snared; and in his eyes the while, determined fires were burning brightly, moment by moment.

At length the girl looked up. Her face was as white as a winding sheet, her lips purple and compressed, the broad, smooth brow wrinkled into a frown of soul-suffering, the large blue eyes lack-luster and dim. She endeavored to speak, but, at first, her lips refused to move.

Wildfern gazed at her half-anxiously; but there was no pity in his look; all was power—remorselessness.

But Sadie Sayton at length said, in a voice just above a whisper—spoke the words as if she were temporizing:

"I can love but one man; I am plighted to that man already!" and she buried her face in her hands, as the dark, damning revelation of the night before rushed over her again with ten-fold strength.

"Ha! ha! plighted to another! Ay! and he a strolling vagrant! a fourth-rate actor—a man who can neither appreciate you nor your beauty—a man who has deceived you, by toying with you and then giving his real love to one of his kind—a low-born, obscure actress, with no name and nothing else, save a faded childish face and oily tongue! Bah! I can read secrets, and I have already learned yours."

Sadie Sayton shook like a leaf, and then a vicious crimsoning passed over her cheeks; she raised her head and glared like a tigress in the face of the man before her.

"Give me the *PROOF* of this!" she gasped. "Give me the proof, or I'll brand you as a coward and a falsifier!"

Her eyes fairly blazed with angry lightning as she uttered the words above, nor did she remove her scintillating orbs from Wildfern's face.

The man sat upright at her vehemence, and the look of brutish admiration on his face grew intenser. But then he smiled again, scornfully, as he said:

"Methinks, my pretty one, you do not need much proof after what you beheld last night through the window of the old house! Ha! ha! You see, my girl, I know everything!"

Sadie again shrunk away.

There was, indeed, but a faint hope that other proof of her lover's faithfulness would be required. She had not forgotten the sight she had seen in the house in Catharine street; she had not forgotten that in that house, so lonely, so deserted-like, she had seen Allan Hill holding in his arms a strange girl.

She shuddered, and her bosom heaved wildly; but she controlled herself as she said, in a low, decided tone:

"And yet, I must have *other* proof. Like me, he may have been the victim of design. No, no, man! I'll not distrust him. I *know* he is true to me still!"

Wildfern paused, and bent his head before he replied. When he looked up he asked, in an eager tone:

"And so you would have further proof, eh? Let me know if he wore ornaments of value of any kind?" and he gazed her somewhat anxiously in the face.

Sadie did not answer at once. She had noted the quick, eager look—the anxious glitter in the man's eyes. But she was powerfully wrought upon; she was thinking of the diamond pin which *she* had given her lover, and the thought now rushed over her mind that this man knew something of that lover's gift.

But, with her heart in her mouth, she faltered:

"Yes, yes; he wore a diamond scarf-pin; it was made in the shape of a hand," and she watched his face.

For an instant Wildfern quailed under that look, and he bent his head to conceal his emotion. When he looked up and replied, his words were very serious.

"Then *that* pin shall be a proof for you," he said, decidedly. "He has given it to the girl he loves, and never wears it, himself, save on the stage. I will get that pin from the girl, for *she does not love* the man; she *plays* with him, to wheedle him out of his earnings. In less than twenty-four hours I will show you the jewel. If that will not be sufficient, I will, under certain conditions on your part, show you other sights. Till then I'll leave you. Ha! by Jove! 'tis later than I thought," he exclaimed, as he drew out his watch and glanced at it. "I must be off; but before I go, my sweet one, I claim just one kiss for keeping you company so long!"

As he spoke he sprang to his feet, and darted upon the girl. In the twinkling of an eye Sadie eluded him, and rushed behind the bed. The man was not to be deterred; he advanced upon her. The poor girl plead, but vainly.

Then a fixed determination grew upon her face.

"Stand back, sir! I am prepared, and will defend myself to the last!" and in a moment a bright blade flashed in her hand.

Wildfern retreated, awed and astounded. Then, with the eyes of a basilisk, he glared at her. Summoning his courage, he made ready to dash upon her again.

But then there came a decided rap on the door.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THWARTED.

WILLIS WILDFERN paused and stepped back hastily to the door. He opened it and looked out.

Lady Maud was standing there.

"You are wanted, captain," she said, in a low voice; "Wild Tom is at the door. As last night, he says his business is urgent."

Wildfern did not reply. He frowned slightly, and then turning his head, he gave Sadie a significant look, and, without any words, went out. He locked the door securely, and gave the key to Lady Maud.

The two hurried down-stairs—neither speaking.

But when Wildfern had nearly reached the door at the street, he suddenly paused.

"By Jove! I forgot!" he exclaimed, and he took off the wig and false beard, and flinging them aside, went on.

"What luck, captain?" asked the woman as if she had been making up her mind to put the question. Her voice trembled slightly. "Can you force her to wed you?"

"Luck? ha! ha! why, well, 'tis all right, or will be by the time I come again. But I have forgotten something else. If any one should come here tomorrow, Lady Maud, in answer to an advertisement, say that what they seek has been delivered up already. Do you understand?"

"Exactly, captain; and what is the advertisement?" asked Lady Maud, with some curiosity, a strange fire in her eye.

"You will know in good time, but not now; I am hurried."

With that the man opened the front door and went out. At the bottom of the steps he joined another man, and together they hurried away. They took their way up Locust street, and soon disappeared in the gloom.

That night, just before the performance at the Chestnut Street Theater was over, two men emerged from a court in Juniper street, between Chestnut and Market, and took their way stealthily along. On reaching Chestnut street they hurried down until they were opposite the theater. Here, in the gloom of the overhanging houses, they paused and kept their eyes bent upon the theater, and on the corner at the drug-store.

Then, at last, the play was ended, and the crowd began to pour out into the streets; and then Frank Hayworth appeared in the crowd at the corner, and hurried down Twelfth street.

The men had seen him, and after noting the direction he had taken, they walked rapidly away down the same street, taking care to keep well ahead of the actor.

When Willis Wildfern had gone, Lady Maud leaned breathlessly against the door.

"Poor, poor thing—forced to marry a villain! and I cannot help her! But, I'll see! I'll see!"

She turned at once and went up-stairs. In a moment she was in Sadie's room again—a moment more she had the poor girl in her arms and murmured:

"Poor child, I pity you! I was not always as I am; and—and I will help you if I can."

Then Sadie answered, in a low, sweet whisper:

"God bless you! God bless you!" and clung to her the closer.

It was a very late hour when the Lady Maud left the room of the prisoner; and, as usual, she locked the door.

But, as the woman trod slowly down-stairs, to seek her own secluded room, she muttered:

"I'll stand by her! And if no other means presents for rescuing her, may God strike me dead, if I do not set—"

Here her voice sunk lower, and the rest of the words were lost as she suddenly hurried down-stairs.

We have left Agnes Hope in a rather cavalier manner, unnoticed for sometime. It will be remembered, too, that we left her under rather peculiar circumstances.

We will now return to her lonely room, where she was so suddenly startled by the entrance of a man.

One glance at him who had entered thus uncereemoniously, and Agnes uttered a cry, and staggered backward in her room.

The man paused for a moment and leered like a demon at her.

"Ha! Agnes Hope, you did not expect me; but you did another! Ha! ha! I am ahead of him!" and he advanced boldly into the room.

"You here, Willis Wildfern!" exclaimed the maiden, shrinking still further from him, and raising her hands as if to ward him off.

The man laughed.

"There is no need to answer that question, Agnes, seeing that you know me," he said. "You see I have long promised you a visit, and I thought to-night was as good a time as any. Besides that, this is my house, and I suppose I have a right to come into it, eh?"

"This room is sacred to me, Willis Wildfern, and you know it. You certainly are aware of my recent affliction; are you not man enough to respect me in my sorrow?"

For a moment the fellow cast his eyes down, and it really seemed that a shade of remorse flitted over his face. But he quickly looked up, and certainly there was no such shade there then.

"Why, Agnes Hope, I could not prevent your mother from dying. That was the doctor's business. Nor have I—for I must be candid—any extra amount of sorrow at the calamity. All I care for is my rent for the last two months. Have you got it?" and he smiled satanically in her pale, haggard face.

The poor girl started perceptibly, and her frame shook violently. But her emotion passed off, and she said, in a low voice.

"'Tis a strange time—an unseasonable hour—for you to come for your money."

"That is not the question, Agnes Hope; I choose my own time for doing what I please—remember that! Have you the money for the rent, and can you settle now?" and he advanced a step nearer to her.

The girl looked at him with affright, and retreated still further into the room.

"I have always, always, paid you, Mr. Wildfern," she gasped, "but I have not the money now. I do not earn much; and I had to purchase things for my

poor mother, sir!" and she broke down from emotion.

"Then get your lover, Frank Hayworth, to pay it for you!" exclaimed the man, rudely. "I am sure you are not chary with your favors to him!"

"Monster! villain! What mean you?" exclaimed the girl, her frail form dilating with sudden indignation, her eyes flashing fire. She half-advanced upon the man.

"I have touched you tenderly, I see, my charmer," said Wildfern, with a sneer.

"But, I will answer your question thus: I mean that you love this actor too much for a sister, that is, some would think so. There, is that plain enough?"

"Oh, wicked villain! despicable wretch that you are!" exclaimed the girl, her whole being worked up to an ungovernable degree, "I fling back your words! I scorn them! and spit upon you! Begone, sir, and leave me, leave me alone with my sorrow! Begone, sir, and respect a friendless woman. Begone! for I loathe the sight of you!" and she indignantly waved him from the room.

But Wildfern did not move; he stood perfectly quiet, and smiled wickedly.

"No, no, Agnes Hope, I'll not go!" he said, in a low, determined voice. "I came on a double business; when it is accomplished expect me to go, and not before! Need I recall to you an old-time tale, Agnes Hope? Methinks there is no occasion. Need I recall to you a bargain once made between you and myself? Need I freshen your memory by telling you that long years ago—when I was poor and honest—honest? ha! ha!—that I loved you madly? And you, Agnes Hope, said that you loved me! How lying were your lips! But, I suspected you; and then you said, solemnly; 'If I do not wed you, Willis, you may cut the mark of a cross upon my brow, and mar my beauty forever.' Then we made that bargain; ay! and both of us swore to it! Now, Agnes, you have not wedded me, you say you will not wed me! I have come for the forfeit. I have spared you thus long; but, now the hour is here, and I am prepared and ready for the work!"

As he spoke he advanced upon her at once. There was a terrible earnestness in his tone, a fearful, snake-like glitter in his eye. He continued to advance upon the poor girl, who had now retreated into the extreme corner of the room.

"Back! back, Willis Wildfern! in those days I did but jest! and you know it was but a jest," Agnes exclaimed, in a desperate, agonizing voice. "Back! or I'll cry for help. Oh, God! spare me, spare me, man!" she cried, in piteous, wailing tones, as the villain darted upon her.

"Cry for help, my pretty Agnes! Cry away and as loud as you please; but 'tis of no avail. And, remember that the hour is late, and no one passing! So cry away, but at last you are in my hands!"

As he uttered the last words he drew a keen knife and threw himself upon her at a bound. The girl struggled wildly; and then the old house rung with shriek after shriek. But Agnes was a baby in that strong man's arms. Then his broad palm covered her mouth.

At that instant there was a furious clatter and banging at the street door down-stairs.

Wildfern paused, and a dark frown came over his face. He bent his head and listened. The knocks were momentarily increasing, and the door was shaken violently.

The man, still holding his hand over the girl's mouth, glanced quickly around him. Then, in the twinkling of an eye, he hurled the maiden rudely to the floor, and the long knife was pointed to her throat, as the man whispered, fiercely:

"I am going now! But, dare breathe my name, and you are a dead woman! Swear to me, Agnes Hope, that you will not reveal me to living soul, as having been here to-night! Swear! or, by heavens, I'll drive the knife into your throat!" and he pushed the keen knife venomously forward.

There was no time for the girl to think—the man was in terrible earnest, and death stared her in the face.

"I—I swear," she said in a low voice.

The man at once released her, and darted to the front window. In an instant he had flung up the sash, sprung out, and, holding by the sill, found with his feet the shutter below, and swung himself to the pavement.

He was not a moment too soon; for at that moment the front door gave way with a crash, flying feet echoed in the hall and up the stair-case, and in a few seconds Frank Hayworth burst like a tornado, into the room.

CHAPTER XXV.

READING ADVERTISEMENTS.

THE reader will remember that Frank Hayworth was left all alone, lying senseless and motionless upon the snow-covered pavement of the street. Those who had so murderously assailed him, as we know, hurried off, at once, as if their work was done, and done to suit them.

For fifteen minutes the actor lay perfectly quiet; but then suddenly there was a sign of returning consciousness. A shiver passed through his frame, then another, and in a moment he sat up in the snow, and gazed around him. In an instant every thing flashed over him; and there around him were the marks of the recent struggle. Then a terrible thought went like a racing wind through his brain, and by a quick effort he sprang to his feet.

Frank Hayworth did not pause, but glancing around him in every direction he buttoned his coat about him, and strode on down Twelfth street. Just before he reached Catharine street he fancied he saw before him a flitting figure. He paused to examine it. This occasioned a delay of some minutes.

But then, all at once, whatever it was, the figure disappeared. And then the actor stood in Catharine street. He started suddenly as if pierced with a knife; for just then a long, wailing shriek, and then an agonizing cry for help, rung out from the old house just above, which he knew so well, and echoed with startling effect upon the sleeping air.

Frank Hayworth knew that shriek—that cry. He waited not a moment but dashed on. When he reached the house he found the door not only locked, but evidently barred.

And still the cries came forth from that upper room.

Putting his shoulder against the panel, and exerting his whole strength, the actor was gratified in seeing the door give way with a crash; and in a moment the young man had bounded up-stairs, and then stood in the room of Agnes Hope, the actress.

He glanced around him like a tiger; but he saw no object upon which to wreak his vengeance. He glanced at the window through which the night-wind was sweeping raw and chill; then he shrugged his shoulders.

Hurrying to the window, he closed the sash, and returned at once to Agnes.

The poor girl was lying on the floor, her face to the bare boards, her long black hair in wild disarray falling over her head in disordered profusion. She did not move a limb.

In an instant the actor knelt by her side, and raised the girl in his strong arms. She still made no sign, and gave no motion.

Frank Hayworth turned the sweet white face so that the light fell upon it. Oh, how haggard—how anguished—how stricken that face!

The actor started.

"Arouse, Agnes, my sister!" he whispered in her ear, in a tone full of yearning sympathy; "I am here."

As the warm, earnest words fell upon her slumbering ear, Agnes started. The blood flowed to her cheeks and she opened her eyes. As her gaze flashed upon Frank Hayworth, she uttered a low cry of joy, and staggering to her feet clutched her arms around his neck, and buried her head in his broad bosom.

Frank Hayworth's heart beat wildly, as he felt the encircling arms of the orphan girl tighten around his neck, and as he perceived the thrill of the virgin's heart pulsing tremulously against his own.

But the actor was true to himself. He had fixed the relationship which should exist between him and her, and he would not forget it.

"Oh, Frank!" murmured the girl, "I am so glad you have come! Oh! what a hideous phantom!" she paused all at once.

"Phantom, Agnes? I am sure I heard flying feet, and—and—a man's voice. Tell me that man's name, Agnes, that I may chastise him," and the young fellow leaned down to catch the answer.

But the girl still hesitated.

"Speak, Agnes! tell me the name of him who dared invade the privacy of your chamber!"

The girl shivered; and straightening up she drew away, as, for an instant, a faint blush glowed over her cheek.

She stood alone. Then in a voice almost inaudible, she said:

"I can not reveal his name, Frank."

"Can not! Why, Agnes, what mean you?"

"I mean that I am oath-bound! But 'tis over now, Frank, and I think—the—that is—it will never be repeated. Let it pass. But, I am so glad you are here."

Frank Hayworth did not reply.

After some moments he bade the girl go to bed and rest in peace—that he would sleep in the little room adjoining, and would keep a wakeful eye.

Then, after a soft good-night, the young man retired to the room which he had mentioned.

The night passed and the dawn of another day broke; but the sun was high in the heavens, and broad flashes of his reflected light glittered in the room of Agnes Hope before the girl opened her eyes.

Frank Hayworth had long been up. He had passed a sleepless night, or, one tortured and distorted by grotesque, startling dreams. When he opened his eyes in the morning, and saw the happy sunlight glowing in the room, he smiled sweetly and thanked God, that, at last, the day had come to chase away the gloomy thoughts which were filling his mind.

The fact is, and the actor could not account for it, his mind was overspread with a dark cloud of doubt and fear. He had never felt thus before; and though he strove to shake off the strange foreboding feeling which had taken possession of him, yet he failed entirely.

After dressing that morning, and while poor Agnes still slept, he crept softly down-stairs, and hurried out from the old house, in quest of a breakfast for the two. He was gone a half-hour, when he returned bringing a basket well-filled.

Then Agnes awoke, and was soon dressed. Then the two sat around the little table on which the nice breakfast was spread: and the time passed happily.

An hour from then Agnes accompanied Frank to the boarding-house at which he lodged.

The actor had already obtained a nice room for her. He dared not trust her to remain exposed all alone in the old house on Catharine street. Agnes had hinted to him gently, and with a blushing face, that the rent for two months was due, and that, at present, she had not the money to meet the claim. She also let the young man infer that the owner of the property, Mr. Wildfern, had asked for the rent.

Frank Hayworth had replied soothingly in a few words to all this; and then when Agnes was out of the room, he hastily wrote a note in pencil and placed it away in his pocket. When down-stairs, he

fastened it on the front door, knowing well that Wildfern would be there soon to look after his victim.

Of course the reader must know that Frank Hayworth suspected that Wildfern was the man who had forced his way into the chamber of Agnes Hope. That man was known to the actor, and the reputation he bore was none of the best.

The contents of that note, which Frank Hayworth pinned to the door, were brief. They simply informed Wildfern, that he, the actor, would be at his room—mentioning the street and number of the house—at certain hours, and that he would be prepared to liquidate any claims he had against Miss Agnes Hope.

In her new quarters Agnes grew happy; the black clouds which had lowered over her heart floated slowly but surely away, and at last she saw the glimmer of the sunlight breaking through the rifts above.

Frank Hayworth got ready to go to rehearsal. He started with amazement when he saw that lady's gift—the diamond pin—was missing from his bosom. And the gloom on his heart settled down blacker than ever.

At rehearsal the young man went through his part mechanically, missing his cues here and there, and making the stage manager frown more than once.

When again he was free to go, the manager called Frank Hayworth aside, and told him firmly that he must be more heedful of his role, or he would lose the part assigned him.

The actor apologized, and promising to do better, yet not caring to tell the manager the cause of his remissness, left the theater and hurried down-town.

In a few moments he entered the Ledger office, and left an advertisement to appear for one week. The advertisement was for the lost pin.

Frank Hayworth was very busy that day; he locked himself in his room, and seemed determined to arouse himself from the state of lethargy into which he had fallen. He resolved to bury his troubles in renewed attention to his stage duties—determined as he was, to win back his place in the estimation of the manager, and of the crowds which frequented the theater.

So he strode up and down the room, endeavoring to bring back the old fire, which, in a measure, he had lost. He partly succeeded, and a glow of satisfaction spread over his face, and thrilled through his being. And when Agnes, late in the short winter afternoon, rapped gently at his door, the young man gladly welcomed her.

An hour passed in heart and soul conversation, and then Agnes, happy and buoyant, withdrew to her own neat little chamber, thanking God that He had flung in her way such a friend as Frank Hayworth; at the same time—as a soft and delicious melancholy passed over her—praying that same God, that she might love him *only as a sister*.

And then the actor was all alone again. It lacked yet two hours or more before it was time to go to the theater. Frank Hayworth glanced around him.

A daily paper caught his eye. He drew it toward him, and spreading it open, looked leisurely through its teeming columns.

Suddenly his eye rested a little longer than usual on a paragraph. He read it again; and then again more intently. He laid the paper aside, and leaned his head on his hands, a grave shade growing over his face—a wild, yearning look coming to his eyes.

For some moments he sat thus.

At length he looked up, and once again taking the paper, drew near the dim light. Bending down close, he read aloud in a low but distinct voice:

"FOUND.—At the Chestnut Street Theater, last night, a lady's ring—fine gold, with a ruby setting. The owner can have it by applying at No. 11 Locust street, proving property and paying for this advertisement."

Frank Hayworth paused and looked down. He did not speak; but he was thinking—thinking of a ruby ring which he had once slipped upon a tapering, lily-white finger; thinking and dreaming over the old memories lying so quiet, so dead-like below the surface of the sea of time. And that sea had been stirred by the little paragraph.

Arousing himself however, the actor looked again over the paper, half-smiling to himself, as he dismissed a strange thought which had crept apace through his brain. But scarcely had his eyes rested upon the sheet again, when once more he started, this time as though an arrow had darted into his bosom.

With a wild cry—one-half of joy, half of agony, the young man clutched the paper in his trembling grasp, and held it almost in the flame itself.

His eyes burned down into the sheet, the blood flowed away from his face, and he bit viciously at the ends of the long mustache which swept over his mouth. Then he read this other advertisement, letter by letter, word by word.

"My God! Sadie! Sadie! And the ring! I'll go and see! yes—now!"

Without another word he snatched his hat and overcoat, and then walked rapidly down-stairs. He passed Agnes on the stairs; but his head was bowed down and he scarcely observed her. Then he was in the street.

Agnes paused as Frank Hayworth passed her, and a pang shot through her heart, but she crushed it out, and went on to her room.

The actor strode rapidly away. At last he reached Locust street. He turned to the left and walked on. In a few moments he stood before the door of the mansion in which we have seen Wildfern enter.

He rung the bell. In a few moments the summons was answered.

Frank Hayworth staggered back as he received to his inquiry this answer from Lady Maud:

"The ring has already been claimed, sir."

And then the actor, with an agonized bosom, reeled away.

The reader can imagine how *Hawkshaw* was rendered that night.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GOD SPEED YOU, FROM AN ENEMY.

THAT night, when the actor left the theater, he did not return straight home, but strode away down the street. Reaching the Continental Hotel, he entered and examined the book of guests at the clerk's desk. His examination was brief but thorough.

He did not find the name he was seeking.

He crossed over at once to the Girard House, and made a like examination of the books there, and with a similar success.

He walked forth into the street, and as he reached the curb, he paused and pondered for a moment. Then he turned at once and hurried up the street. In a few moments he was at the St. Lawrence Hotel.

He entered, and going to the clerk's desk glanced carefully over the leaves of the register. But still, he did not find the name he was seeking.

As he was about closing the large book, he started slightly, when the leaves fell open at a certain point, and his eyes rested on an entry made some weeks before.

That entry read:

"MISS DAVIS AND MAID, VIRGINIA."

The young man gazed at the name for a moment; the word *Virginia* was familiar to the sight, but he knew of no Miss Davis. And then the entry was evidently in a man's handwriting.

With a sigh, Frank Hayworth turned and strode out into the street; thence he took his way toward home.

But he had not despaired of finding what he was seeking—that something suggested by the last advertisement he had read in the LEDGER.

He hurried on however, for the hour was late, and then he was almost certain that Agnes was sitting up waiting for him.

We might as well in this place tell the reader the advertisement which had so startled Frank Hayworth.

It read thus:

"FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD for specific information as regards the whereabouts of my beloved daughter, Sadie Sayton. She left my home clandestinely a little over three weeks ago, and from what I can learn, and from what I suspect, she has gone to Philadelphia. Should this meet her eye, I beg her for her old love of me to return to her poor distracted father, who is sick in mind and in body."

"Any one giving reliable information of my dear daughter can obtain the above reward, besides a father's undying gratitude, by addressing

"COLONEL SAYTON,
"Charles City C. H. Va."

Late this same night, two men in an open furniture-wagon drove up to the entrance of a small squalid alley below Fitzwater street and alighted.

No word was spoken, and the men disappeared in the alley. They were gone a few moments, when they returned bearing between them a large, heavy frame-work, which resembled rudely a printing press. This they hurriedly yet softly deposited in the wagon, and at once returned up the alley.

A few moments elapsed when they reappeared a second time, bringing between them another similar apparatus, which they likewise deposited in the wagon.

Then they looked around them carefully in all directions. No one was in sight.

Leaping into the wagon they drove away—not hastily, but slowly, guardedly. At length they reached Fifteenth street. Into this they turned.

As soon as they had well entered Fifteenth street, the driver struck the horse a smart blow and away the wagon rattled. The animal was not spared, and the vehicle sped rapidly away.

The men did not draw rein until they had reached Coates street, far away. Here they paused for a moment in their headlong career and looked cautiously about them.

Still there was no one in sight.

They at once turned the horse's head to the left, and in a moment were rattling out the street last mentioned. On they clattered and jolted, making the silent, sleeping streets to echo again and again.

Now and then a window-sash was suddenly hurled up and a night-capped head was protruded. But the poor horse was *not* running away, and the sash went down again.

The wagon clattered on straight out Coates street. The thickly inhabited portion of the thoroughfare was left behind; and then, at length, they entered the limits of the park.

Still they drew not rein. On they dashed, taking the road leading over the little bridge toward Lemon Hill. At the base of the hill they turned sharply, keeping the broad road leading around the cliffs and skirting the river.

All at once they drew rein. They had reached a point around the bend above the BACHELORS' Barge-house.

There, tied to the bank, was a large row-boat lying motionless in the black, half-congealed, sleeping river.

In a moment the men had leaped to the ground and secured the panting horse.

In ten minutes they had transferred the singular wagon-load, they had hauled, to the boat, and leap-

ing in shoved off the skiff, bent to the oars and were soon urging the craft against the freezing current, up-river.

They had to keep well out in the stream, for the river was fast being frozen over; in fact, it was already covered with a thin coating; and along the shore, where the boat had lain, the ice was quite thick, necessitating considerable effort before the heavily-laden barge could be got clear and into comparatively smooth water.

The men rowed on—not pausing once for breath. The Girard avenue bridge was passed; then Columbia bridge; still the men urged the boat onward.

At length they drew near the silent shades of Laurel Hill Cemetery. Suddenly turning the head in-shore, they drove the craft rapidly through the thickly-forming ice, until it grated on the pebbles of the beach.

The men leaped ashore and at once set to work to unload the boat. Lading themselves this time with both of the singular-looking pieces of framework at once, they began the ascent of the sharp hill.

They were men of brawn, and they did not even stop once though the load they bore was enormous, and the hill they were ascending almost like a wall.

At last they reached the summit, and even here they did not stop.

They plunged ahead amid the snow, and amid the dense trees and pale spectral marbles, as if they were at home in the locality.

Suddenly, however, they paused at the entrance of an old, decayed vault, built into a shelving hill in the cemetery.

The men laid aside their load, and kicked away the thick snow before the door. Then one of them applied a key to the rusted lock, and the door of the charnel-house swung back.

The men waited not, but immediately lugged in the pieces of framework, and closed the door behind them.

The dawn was just breaking when two men entered the wagon, away by the boat-house, and drove off toward the city.

And in this early light it was easy to see that a solid sheet of ice covered the bosom of the Schuyl-kill.

The sun could not have been an hour high the next morning when the Lady Maud, having nicely arranged a large waiter, containing a bountiful breakfast, made her way up-stairs to Sadie's room.

In a moment or so, she had softly turned the bolt, and as softly entered the peculiarly arranged, badly ventilated, yet gorgeously and gaudily furnished apartment. Then placing the waiter on the table, she turned around and gazed at the silent form of her who lay so motionless upon the bed.

The Lady Maud had slept so soundly herself the night before, when once she was in bed, that her eyes were not now open as much as they might have been. But she drew near the bed and gazed earnestly at Sadie, who was slumbering so sweetly, so innocently. Then, as a soft expression crept apace over the woman's stern face, she stepped to the door, and pushed it gently, wide open, to allow the purer air to rush in from the hall.

Then she again drew near the bed and looked down on the wondrously fair face of the prisoner-girl—that face now slightly distorted, although calmed into repose by sleep—and marked with a deep line of acute soul-suffering.

Several moments elapsed, and still the Lady Maud bent her eyes on the helpless form and childlike face of Sadie Sayton.

The girl turned in her sleep and murmured gently a few inaudible words, so faint indeed, that they scarcely broke the silence of the apartment. A sweet, heavenly smile, like the changes of a fading sunset, flitted over her face.

But as quick as lightning, and as if by magic, the smile fled frightened away—the lips contracted—the blood in them disappeared, leaving them almost colorless—a deadly pallor routed the roses from her cheeks, and a frown darkly wrinkled the sweet, sad face.

Then, suddenly, the nervous right hand—which had lain extended by the girl's side—darted out into life. In it was tightly gripped the flashing dirk-knife.

With a slight cry of alarm and astonishment, Lady Maud drew back; but instantly approached nearer and said, in a low breath, to herself:

"Thank God! She has defended herself. She defies him yet, and God willing, shall continue to do so!"

These were strange words coming from one of whom, we doubt not, the reader has formed a damaging estimate. But the low, earnest tone, the quivering lip, and, more than all, the tear-drop which fell from her eye, told that Lady Maud had spoken from the heart.

She waited a moment or so; and then, as the armed right hand sunk slowly to its resting-place again, Lady Maud leaned down and whispered gently in the sleeper's ear.

The maiden started, her eyes suddenly opened, a shiver shot over her frame, and then, with a wild cry, Sadie covered her eyes and shrunk away.

"There, my poor child; be not alarmed; for I tell you I am your friend—your friend in any extremity!"

The Lady Maud spoke very decidedly, very earnestly—almost enthusiastically.

Sadie opened her eyes and glanced at her. At one look she saw that the woman had spoken truthfully.

"May God bless you!" she murmured.

Then Lady Maud seated herself by the bedside of the girl, and took the small, hot hand gently in hers.

A long conversation ensued—one in which there was a communion of heart with heart—one which proved that deep down in the fashionable, worldly woman's bosom there was a well-spring of sympathy whose waters had been reached.

When that conversation was ended, the Lady Maud arose, leaned over the girl, kissed her softly, and bade her be of good cheer. Then she went out softly, closing the door behind her. As she left the room she inadvertently dropped from her bosom a morning paper which she had read and put there.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A QUESTION OF TRUST AND—MONEY.

SADIE glanced around her, and then suddenly sat up in bed. She had heard the rustle of the paper; she was now looking for it.

She started as her eyes fell upon it.

Leaping lightly to the floor, she stooped, picked up the newspaper, and drew a chair directly under the light. Greedily spreading open the paper she began to read.

It must be remembered that the room opened not at all on the outside world directly, save through the chimney. Of course not much light could come through that medium. The gas, which was kept constantly burning, therefore, alone lit the apartment.

Sadie glanced hurriedly over the columns of the paper before her; she longed to learn something of the great, bustling world outside, from which she was so closely, so rigidly excluded. To the poor girl it seemed that instead of a day or two, she had been shut up a whole month. The time had dragged heavily with her, and for the most part she had lain in a sort of half-stupor, perhaps *torpor* were a better word.

No wonder, then, that she clutched the paper so tight, and devoured its contents with ravening eyes.

Up and down the closely-printed columns she glanced. Every thing was read with avidity.

Suddenly, as she accidentally gazed over one of the advertising pages, she paused. Her eye burned down into the sheet before her—her bosom heaved, and she gasped for breath.

She had found and read her father's advertisement concerning herself!

The poor girl's brain reeled, and dropping the paper to the floor, she clapped her hands to her burning head. And then, as a copious flow of tears came to her relief, the maiden knelt down and prayed to God to give her strength.

At length she looked up. Her face was calm, and there was quiet in her bosom.

She reached down and again picked up the paper. Once more she glanced over the advertisements.

Suddenly she started again as she saw the name "Frank Hayworth" signed to a notice.

Frank Hayworth was the *Hawkshaw* of that fatal night to her at the theater, and he was one very dear to her.

And then Sadie glanced sadly, musingly, at the finger on which she had worn Allan Hill's last gift—the ruby ring, which she thought now forever lost. Tears came to her eyes, and falling over her pallid cheeks, dropped upon the rich carpet of the floor.

But again Sadie conquered her emotions, and turned to the paper to read Frank Hayworth's advertisement. Scarcely however, had she spread out the crumpled sheet, before she paused and bent her ear. She heard hasty steps ascending the stairs, and then hurrying along the passage.

In a moment, and before Sadie could even let fall the paper, the door of the apartment was suddenly opened and the Lady Maud appeared.

The woman glanced once at Sadie, and as she saw the paper in her lap, she slightly frowned. Then she looked sharp into the girl's face. In that sad countenance she read all.

Then the dark frown fled away from her brow as Lady Maud saw the glad lighting-up of the girl's face. She drew near to her side.

"Give me the paper, Sadie, for that I now know to be your name," she said, in a low, kind tone, at the same time gently taking the paper and placing it in her bosom. "And—and—Sadie, God knows I pity you; I will not desert you."

She paused for a moment, and a tear dimmed her eye as the girl leaned forward trustingly, and laid her hot head, with its rare wealth of golden hair, in her lap.

And Lady Maud, with her large, masculine hand, gently stroked the shining tresses, and softly patted the now haggard cheek. Then, as a heavy sigh broke from her ample bosom, she said, in a voice just above a whisper:

"I can not tell you, my child, how it is—" she hesitated, but almost instantly resumed, "that I am led to you. My heart *does* warm for you, and I would do you a service. Alas, poor child, I say it with shame, I have stood by and seen many dark crimes committed. And I have heard pitiable, gurgling death-moans and cries for help as knives were clashing! And then, with a callous heart and an undimmed eye, I have seen struggling limbs straightened out in death! Oh, God! And, Sadie, a dark fate is in store for you! Do not interrupt me. This man would force you into a horrible, loveless marriage for money! But in me you have a warm, yearning friend—one who now knows your story well—one who pities your youth, and who would see you go forth from this house unspotted and untrammelled; one who would allay the anguish of your poor father's bosom—one who would assist you to find him whom you love! You see, my child, I know all."

Again she paused—again she stroked the golden hair of the sorrowing girl.

Then Sadie raised her head and took Lady Maud's hands gently within hers; and the woman did not

withdraw them. She seemed like a different person.

"Again I say, my dear madam, may God bless you. Oh! can you help me hence? And can you not go with me?" and she laid her cheek close to that of the Lady Maud, and gazed appealingly in her face.

The woman started violently, and then a wild, convulsive shudder swept over her frame. Then, as she rallied, she suddenly drew the girl tenderly to her, and in her own strong grasp pressed her to her bosom.

And now tears were falling fast from the eyes of Lady Maud; and that broad bosom on which she had pillowed the fair head of Sadie Sayton was rising and falling tumultuously—like unto the sea, shaken by the rude winds.

Then, in a low, agonized voice, she spoke:

"No! no! my child!" she exclaimed. "I can not take you hence; nor, alas! can I go with you. My hands are tied, Sadie. I am bound by a fearful power—one which now I can not *openly* break. Oh, God! my child, how your words sink into my soul! How I would long to fling behind me past regrets—to bury my remorse and my repentance deep down in a bottomless grave and flee with you! But—but—not yet! not yet! . . . Hark you, my child," and she suddenly sunk her voice, which had gradually rose to a swelling pitch down to a low underbreath; "as I have said, you have awakened singular emotions in my bosom—emotions which for years have lain dormant—*dead*—as I supposed. I am drawn toward you as by some magnetic influence. . . . If you will listen to me, my child, I will tell you a sad tale, one which perhaps will prove to you that I am not altogether as bad as I seem, nor am to blame wholly for the part I now play. . . . I will tell you of certain dark secrets of the dead years, which first crushed my heart, and then made it callous to all cries for help and mercy. Will you listen, Sadie?" and she again patted softly the cheek laid against her bosom.

The girl nodded, and straightening up seated herself in a chair near Lady Maud, still retaining one of the woman's large hands. And then her soft blue eyes dwelt inquiringly, trustingly, on the woman's face.

Before speaking, however, Lady Maud arose to her feet, entered the passageway without, and listened intently for a moment. Then she returned and closed the door behind her. She seated herself by Sadie's side, and placing her arm around the maiden's waist, she began a strange and fearfully thrilling tale.

This weird recital told by the Lady Maud to Sadie, that cold winter morning, in the strange room of the mysterious Locust street mansion, can not now, or in this story, be laid before the reader; for, though intensely thrilling—even fearful in its details, we must confess that it has no practical bearing in the story we are weaving.

We therefore forbear to give it. A time may come when it will be proper to write up and spread in these columns several mysteries, of which we have no more than hinted in the romance we are writing. Not until that period arrives, however, will we draw aside the veil covering these dark, hideous secrets—that of the Lady Maud included—preferring to let them rest on in oblivion.

A long time—certainly two hours—elapsed before the Lady Maud, who had not paused once, finished. When she ceased, Sadie's face was bathed in tears; and forgetting her own position—forgetting, in fact, that she needed sympathy—she arose to her feet, and flinging her arms around the woman's neck, exclaimed:

"Oh, hideous, monstrous wrong! Oh, my dear friend, from the bottom of my heart I pity you! Again I beg you, let us go hence. We will fly together; and when—when my mission is accomplished, I will take you to my own sweet home in the wild-woods of the South, where I can safely promise you an asylum for the remainder of your days!"

The Lady Maud trembled like a leaf; the changing hues that flashed through her bosom—the deep corrugations of the brow, told of the conflict raging between those emotions.

Suddenly she exclaimed:

"Oh, God! my child, how you tempt me! Cease! cease! for now it can not be. But—but, Sadie Sayton, you are near unto my heart, and I'll stand by you, and save you from the fate which awaits you. Ay! I'll do it, though perdition stood in my way! And now good-by, Sadie. Be brave, be hopeful, and, above all things, guard well the dagger you possess. It may be the means, at last, of your safety. Trust me. 'Tis all I ask."

With that, the Lady Maud, after imprinting a warm, earnest kiss upon Sadie's brow, arose to her feet and left the room. And, as she had always done, she closed the door, and locking it from the outside, held Sadie, a prisoner, as ever.

Lady Maud paused as she entered the hallway. The light from the gas in the entry below flashed faintly upward, and striking the well-burnished glass of a window on the opposite side, fell directly on the woman's face.

Strange to say, a smile, sardonic, fiendish and mocking, was curling the lip of the Lady Maud.

Had the woman been toying with Sadie Sayton? Had she been simply playing a well-studied, oft-acted role?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A QUARTER-GRAIN OF MORPHINE.

The day passed slowly away.

About four o'clock in the afternoon, Willis Wildfern rung the bell at the mansion in Locust street. He was quickly admitted by Lady Maud.

A long and earnest conversation took place between the two.

Wildfern smiled grimly, yet in a satisfied manner, when he learned that a person had called for the ring, the night before, and that that person was our acquaintance, Frank Hayworth, the actor.

The man had laid his plans well, and he now knew that he had his game at advantage.

While sitting in the parlor this afternoon, he suddenly drew from his pocket a small parcel. Opening it, he let fall its contents into a glass half full of water. Then he handed the glass to Lady Maud, at the same time glancing at her significantly.

The woman started, and looked at him fearfully.

"What is it, captain?" she asked.

"Morphine, Lady Maud."

"Morphine! A fearful dose! And for whom, Willis Wildfern?" and the woman did not take the glass.

The man frowned, and an oath was upon his lips; but he kept it back. He had keenly noted the change in deportment in Lady Maud, and he dared not offend her. He was *afraid* of the woman since that stormy night of the altercation, a few evenings before. She had shown then an insubordination, nay, a spirit of desperation, which was altogether quite unusual with her. His policy was to soothe—to conciliate; and Wildfern could do this. He was an adept at many things—he was a good actor.

"Morphine! Yes, dear Lady Maud," he said, "The dose is not large: the powder contains a large amount of sugar. My object simply is to stupefy and bewilder the girl, that when she awakens she will the more readily consent to be my wife. There is only a quarter-grain of the opiate, Lady Maud."

"Are you telling me the truth, Willis Wildfern? The truth, before God and man?" asked the woman, sternly.

"What do you know about God?" asked the man, with a sneer, and in a tone which he could not disguise.

"Little enough, Captain Willis, but enough to fear Him!" was the quiet reply.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Wildfern, attempting all the time to evade the question. "You are turning moralist, Lady Maud! Ha! ha!"

Despite his laugh and mocking tone, however, there was a deep seriousness in the man's meaning; he did indeed fear that this woman who had been so long his tool *was* turning "moralist," as he phrased it.

But Lady Maud was in earnest. She kept her eyes bent on the man, as she said firmly:

"You may laugh as you wish, captain; but I can tell you one thing: I'll not give this draught to Sadie Sayton unless you *swear* solemnly to me that it contains no more than a quarter-grain of morphine."

"Sadie Sayton! Ha! You know, then, her name, my dear Lady Maud?" and Wildfern gazed furiously at her. "Whence did you derive your knowledge?" and his gaze deepened into one of the most icy-like sternness.

Wildfern was thinking of the money—the large sum which stood at the head of old Colonel Sayton's advertisement. That day, ever since the notice in the morning paper had caught his eye, he himself had been laying some deep-laid plans. He had reasoned with his own dark self that it would be very nice—indeed, highly diplomatic—if he could, under his own name, win as his wife, by force and threats, such a queenly girl as Sadie Sayton, and then, under a disguise, or through Wild Tom, claim fifty thousand dollars, *good* money, as the reward for furnishing information of the girl. It seems the villain, in his schemings, never took old Colonel Sayton into account.

Now, all at once, he thought things were taking a different turn. *Was Lady Maud aiming, too, for the reward-money?*

All this revolved in his mind as he asked the woman the question he did. Then, as his eyes were riveted on her face, he awaited her answer.

This was not slow in coming.

"Where did I get my knowledge? Ha! ha! I hope you have not forgotten that I can read, and that I sometimes peruse the papers! More than that, the girl answers to the name of Sadie; I have tried her."

"You have? Indeed! You have an inquiring mind, Lady Maud; and a *displeasing* mind, too! What did you tell the girl of me?" and he glanced at her fiercely.

"Nothing to your detriment, Willis Wildfern; though, had I been inclined to use it, I had ample material at hand," said the woman, in response.

"You speak well—*boldly*, Lady Maud!" muttered the man, still endeavoring to keep down his anger.

To this the woman did not reply, but fixing her eyes on him, said:

"This is nonsense, captain! Answer me—nay, *swear* to me that that water contains only a single quarter-grain of morphine."

The man winced, but he knew that the other's eyes were fixed upon him, and he was compelled to reply:

"I swear to you, then, that what I have told you is the truth," he said. "But, why are you so particular about this matter? Methinks from your frequent administrations of the same remedy, *under other circumstances*, you had grown used to it, and to watching its wondrous effect."

"I will be frank with you, Wildfern," said the woman, after a slight pause, "I am tired of your rule, and—nay, do not interrupt me so soon—and I will be glad when the day comes that you will find no more villainy to do! More than that, I will be doubly rejoiced when the hour comes for us to part. Now, in this particular case, I will not administer a powerful drug, because the girl is already weak and faint,

and a large dose would assuredly kill her. *I will no longer be accessory to murder!*"

Willis Wildfern bent his head, and pondered for several minutes. We can not, or rather shall not, attempt to tell what was passing in his mind.

However, when he looked up, his face, if not smiling, was certainly not frowning. He said, calmly:

"Very good. As you say, Lady Maud! We will not quarrel. Administer the small dose this time, and, *the hour for our separation may be nearer than you think!*"

There was a world of latent meaning in Willis Wildfern's words.

Perhaps the Lady Maud did not fathom deep enough for that meaning; perhaps *she did*.

And in a few moments Wildfern arose to his feet. He placed his hand in his pocket, and drew out a large roll of new money—in paper. Reaching it over to Lady Maud, he said, in a low, significant tone:

"Here, Lady Maud, is a present. The notes are from our old mint in the cemetery—the *first series of the new issue*, struck off there. Take the notes: *they will purchase as much as OLD SAYTON'S FIFTY THOUSAND IN GREENBACKS*. But now I must go. Expect me late to-night, and be surprised at nothing."

Then he left the house.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ON THE SCENT.

As soon as Willis Wildfern was gone—and the night had then fallen—Lady Maud hurried up-stairs with the goblet in hand. Only a moment or so elapsed before she stood in Sadie's room.

She waited not to answer the girl's curiosity, but leaning down, whispered some words in her ear. And then she placed the goblet of water by her side.

Rising to her full height she turned to go, but as she neared the door, she paused and said:

"Be brave, Sadie: be true to yourself, and—*do not forget your dagger!*"

And then she was gone.

* * * It must have been near twelve o'clock that same night, when Willis Wildfern, disguised as we have seen him on former occasions, stood at the door of Sadie Sayton's room. He hesitated but a moment.

Turning the bolt he entered. He glanced like lightning around him.

Sadie was seated quietly in a chair by the bed.

The goblet was empty!

* * * We must go back a little way in our story, for the sake of having an even and unbroken thread—our aim thus far.

When Wildfern left the mansion of Lady Maud, early that evening, he hurried into Walnut street. There he paused and glanced around him. A car was in sight coming along slowly. The man walked down to meet it, and then sprung aboard.

He had not observed a tall, brawny man, who had emerged from the gloom on the shady side of the street opposite the Locust street mansion, and followed on softly behind him. He had not seen this figure, which hung upon his track like a phantom.

Wildfern was wrapped up in his own plans—undoing some—building up others. And then, too, the recent interview with Lady Maud had resulted in a manner he had not anticipated.

He was thinking of this, too, and arranging other plans to meet certain indications and conditions which were suddenly sprung upon him by the bold, decided *mutiny*, as he termed it, of the woman who had worked with him and whom he had befriended for years.

Willis Wildfern was cogitating about the separation to take place between him and Lady Maud; and he instinctively fondled the handle of a knife in the breast-pocket of his inside coat.

That the man was satisfied with his plans was very certain; for when he reached Walnut street—and the distance was not great—he smiled grimly to himself.

He had not seen the tall man who had dogged him. But that man had seen him.

As soon as Wildfern was in the cars the person, who had stepped into the shade of a house at the corner, shrugged his shoulders, and turning at once retraced his steps toward the Locust street mansion. This man seemed to court obscurity—walking on the thin, unlit side of the street; but as he passed near a lamp, the reflection of the light struck, for an instant, full upon his person.

As quick and fleeting as was the flash from the lamp, it revealed a bright row of brass buttons, and a star glittering on the breast of the man's coat; also a heavy baton belted in a sling around the waist.

Then the person was in the shade again, and he was still hurrying on toward Locust street.

In a few moments he turned into this latter thoroughfare, still keeping the shady side. And then he joined a companion, who stood motionless in the gloom directly opposite the residence of Lady Maud. The men were policemen.

Perhaps they had been sent by—well, by Frank Hayworth—to watch this mysterious house.

When the actor had called for the ring, he was not particularly pleased with the appearance of the woman who had held the door half open to answer his summons.

As he had walked away he linked together, in his mind, the advertised ring and Sadie Sayton; then the latter, by some strange concatenation of thought, with the suspicious house, so closely locked and shut in to itself.

Besides that, since his short sojourn in the city, Frank Hayworth had heard some very singular, very startling reports of this house.

So perhaps these belted guardians of the night had been dispatched thither on a term of duty, at the instance of the actor.

And there they stood, silent and almost motionless—their forms mingling with the surrounding gloom. But they were not drowsy nor inattentive. Their eyes kept vigilant watch over the house and its adjacent surroundings.

As for the mansion it was wrapped in absolute quiet, and not a light from the black, somber pile gleamed forth on the night.

* * * Willis Wildfern did not get out of the car until it had reached the Schuylkill. Here he sprung out, and hurrying along Twenty-third street, at last reached Market. Here he paused for a moment, and for the time, seemed lost in reflection.

He did not consume many moments then; for suddenly he turned abruptly to the left, and strode away toward the Market street bridge. Some moments elapsed before he stood on the opposite side.

Skirting along the river-bank, he was speedily swallowed up in the gloom.

When we saw the man next, he was crossing Columbia bridge. This did not take any length of time. Then diving down by the bank of the river, he pushed his way along as fast as he could, and as circumstances would allow.

Willis Wildfern was in earnest. That his business was serious, or urgent, was likewise apparent. The man would not have taken such a long walk, and so incommoded himself, on this, one of the coldest nights of the winter, for a trifling stake.

On he strode, never pausing once. He seemed gifted with wonderful power of endurance for one as luxurious as he. All this energy may have been developed by the stimulus of the object in view. That he *had* an object in view there can be no doubt.

On he went, winding around the tall, frowning bluffs which bordered the banks of the river. At one time his figure could be seen by the faint starlight of the night; at another it would be wholly obscured in the deep gloom of the lonely road—or more properly speaking—path.

At length he reached the rear of Laurel Hill cemetery. Above him, on the heights, slept in almost absolute quiet the lone city of the dead.

The mournful sighing of the night-wind through the leafless branches of the trees, made a sad, melancholy music, which echoed down the bluff, that cold night, and fell on Wildfern's ear.

The man paused, and an involuntary shudder crept over his frame. He glanced quickly around him, as if he expected to see arise at his elbow some grim and ghastly phantom. Wildfern cowered away against a snow-covered rock as these fears swept over him; and in the sighing of the night-wind, he fancied he heard with awful distinctness the gibberings of a lost spirit.

The man shook in every limb, and clung closer to the rock.

Suddenly, however, he drew from his breast-pocket a flask, and placing it to his lips, took a long, deep draught.

"Ha! ha!" he exclaimed, as he placed the bottle out of sight. *"That gives me life and strength! That gives me courage to face a hundred devils, and to care nothing for—for—the pale faces which will rise up around me! And why should I care for them? They are cold—dead! Nay, they have moldered beneath the turf! . . . Turf! Are they beneath the turf? Oh! God! no—no! no! But, they can not harm me now, for they are dead—dead! I must go on! I must win the heart, or crush the impious soul of Sadie Sayton! Oh! the wild dream of bliss which floats through my brain as I think of her! She shall be mine! Nothing shall thwart me—nay, not even Heaven itself!"*

As he spoke he hurried on again along the snow-covered path. He proceeded some minutes without stopping; but, at length he paused, and turning abruptly to the right, commenced to climb the steep acclivity.

This did not consume many minutes. When the man stood on the top, he glanced hurriedly around him through the gloom in every direction.

What he feared, or what he was looking for, in this lonely place, it were hard to conjecture. But Willis Wildfern was wary, and with or without reason he now looked around him keenly.

Naught, however, save the pale, dull-white marbles, gleaming with a spectral pallor all around, fell upon his gaze.

Then he plunged on again.

Suddenly he paused and stood as still as a statue; for at his feet, showing distinctly in the gloom, was the impression of footprints in the snow.

A tremor passed over the man's frame, a pallor, though it could not be seen, sprung to his face. He leaned down and examined the tracks closely. They were made by a large boot, and they were deeply indented, as if he who walked was a heavy man, and trod boldly. And they led in the same direction that he was going!

Wildfern slowly arose to an erect posture, and glanced again, cautiously, around him.

Despite the bitter cold, despite the strong draught he had swallowed, he trembled like a leaf, and a sweat broke out profusely on his face.

Once more he drew out the flask, and applying it to his lips, drank deeply, almost draining the contents before he breathed.

"I must begone!" he muttered. "I feel a deep gloom hanging over me! I feel a rope around my neck! But—but—first Sadie shall be mine! Then for a final settlement of the old scores with certain parties, and I'll be off! Philadelphia, nay, the broad land itself, will be too hot for me, and that in a very few days. Once this ravishingly-beautiful girl

conquered, *then*, my Lady Maud, we may measure our hatred and our knives! But I must begone."

So saying, he turned at right-angles to the direction in which he was first proceeding and strode away quickly.

After walking on for some two hundred yards, he again turned to the left, virtually resuming the old course he had left. He paused not at all, for the night was deepening, and Wildfern had work enough before him ere the coming of the dawn.

All at once, however, he stopped, as a small, bright light flashed out from a gloomy pile before him.

"Ha!" he muttered, in an anxious tone. "Tom is careless! and—and—there are visitors on the hill!"

So speaking, he hurried on, and in a moment had entered the vault and closed the door. In an instant, then, the light ceased to shine.

Scarcely had Wildfern entered the vault, when a noiseless band, consisting of at least twenty men, suddenly emerged from the gloom, and drew silently around the vault.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BACK TRACK.

WILLIS WILDFERN glanced around him as he entered the vault. Tom, with his coat off, was working vigorously at a press. The result of his labor was piled in a large heap on a table. This pile consisted of bank-notes, so nicely and accurately engraved from photographic blocks, that the closest inspection failed to detect in them any defect whatsoever.

The negro paused as Wildfern entered.

"Glad to see you, cap'n," he said, cordially; mon-s'ous lonesome all by yourself—out here all by yourself in this burying-ground! Tired o' staying here, I can tell you; so I thought I'd 'muse myself by making a little money. Money comes handy now and den, and—dar is my pile. Ha! ha!" he exclaimed, pointing to the notes.

But Wildfern did not smile—did not say a word; but, walking straight to the glowing lamp, he drew a screen over it, thus confining the rays to the gloomy vault. Then he said, in a half-scared, half-angry tone:

"You should be more careful, Tom! I saw the reflection of that light plainly, twenty yards from the door. You should have screened the lamp, or covered the slot; and I tell you, my fine fellow, we can not be too careful. There are visitors on the 'Hill' to-night!"

"De debbil! How you know dat?" and Tom glanced quickly at the other.

"From the best of proof; I have seen tracks, and they were not made by a lady's slipper! But, put up the press, and tie up the money—we'll need it soon! I feel that trouble is coming! And—yes—no, Tom, strike off a few thousand more; I'll help you. I think we will not return here, soon."

Tom looked very serious, and then an anxious shade came to his face. But he replied only with an expressive grunt, and a long, low-drawn whistle, telling that he was uneasy at the news.

Then once more he stood by the press.

Wildfern, throwing off his coat, approached the press likewise.

They set to work. For a half-hour nothing was heard but the monotonous clicking and creaking of the machinery, and the flutter of the notes as they slanted in the air and settled down with a rustle on the floor.

Suddenly Wildfern paused.

"We have enough, Tom, to last us a few years anyway—this will do. Now I want to talk a little with you."

Then a low conversation ensued, lasting nearly an hour. When it had ended, the men arose to their feet.

"You must not fail me, Tom," said Wildfern; "you can get the carriage and horses at the same place, you know. Be *mum* and be discreet! After to-night we must change quarters. . . . Now, we'll go."

As he spoke he drew near the door to reconnoiter. The lamp was still covered with the cloth.

Wildfern put his eye to a long, narrow, perpendicular slot in the door, and peered around outside.

The white spectral snow gave forth a pale, dead-white glamour.

Wildfern started violently; his limbs shook beneath him, and turning softly, he said, in a low, agitated voice:

"We're caged, Tom! Look—but be careful."

He gave way for the other as he uttered these words. The black instantly took his place, and placing his red eyes to the opening, looked out.

He ground his teeth together, and then, with a threatening gesture, quickly felt under his coat-bosom for his knife.

No wonder these men were startled; for, standing around the vault, were numbers of silent, stalwart figures. The pale, ghastly glimmer from the snow, twinkling on the brass buttons of their coats, told that they were policemen. They were almost as motionless as statues, and their gaze was bent upon the door of the vault.

Silently, even as they who stood without, did the two within draw away from the entrance toward the rear of the vault.

"Yes, cap'n, we's caged sure enough!" said the negro. "But we can double on 'em by de back track, and teach 'em a trick yet," and he smiled grimly.

"Yes, Tom," replied Wildfern, in an excited undertone. "I understand you; the *Rat Hole* and the *keg of powder*, eh?"

"Exactly so, cap'n," said the negro, himself beginning to partake of the excitement.

"Then we'll pack the money, and lay the train, for time is precious."

As Wildfern spoke he strode to the table, and began to pack tightly the counterfeit notes. In this work he was assisted by Tom.

In a few moments the task was done, and the several bulky parcels were placed in a bag. Then, Wild Tom going into the rear of the vault brought back a keg of medium size. He unscrewed a wooden plug from the bottom of the keg, and then beginning at the table, laid a train of powder all the way to the door of the vault. Connecting with this terminus of the train, Wild Tom placed the keg itself.

Then Wildfern, taking the globe off from the lamp, tied a twine to the handle of the latter, and placed the flaming light just beyond, *but in a line with*, the powder, and then quickly attached the cord to the vault door.

When the door should be opened, the result can easily be imagined.

Glancing around them once more, the men with a low laugh turned and disappeared in the rear of the vault.

A half-hour elapsed, when suddenly they appeared again, working their way slowly out of the side of the loamy, frosty hill, back of Laurel Hill. In a few moments they stood in the broad, snow-covered pleasure road below, and then they hurried off and were soon out of sight.

All was silence and gloom again in the sleeping God's Acre, and the winding sheet of pallid snow gleamed dead and dull beneath the bare-armed trees.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN THE HANDS OF THE FOWLER.

WILDFERN and his singular companion paused for nothing, but kept up a vigorous stride, bending their steps toward the city.

The suburbs were reached, and then they entered Coates street at Fairmount. Continuing down Coates as far as Twelfth, they turned into the latter and pushed on rapidly.

As they reached Spring Garden street, the clock on the hall-tower at the corner above, struck eleven.

"Come, come, Tom—we must hurry," muttered Wildfern. "Tis later than I thought," and away they strode.

Just before they reached Chestnut street, they saw the large outpouring streams of people flowing in different directions. They knew that the play was over. But they paused not.

Just, however, as they stood by the little back alley running up to the rear of the Chestnut Street Theater, a man and a woman—the latter hanging on the arm of the other—emerged from the dark passageway.

Wildfern and Tom were close behind them, and Wildfern knew both the man and the woman.

"I am sorry, Agnes," said the man, in a low voice, "that I consented for you to come and witness the performance. I was fearful of the effect it might exert upon your nerves. And—and—Agnes, I wanted to speak with you to-night in my room—to tell you a tale—to draw from you your sisterly sympathy. Now, I am afraid that—"

"Be afraid of nothing, Frank, my brother," interrupted the girl, in a sweet, confiding voice. "Now, that I am in the purer atmosphere, I feel better, and, Frank, I will listen to any thing you may have to say."

Then the two hurried on down toward Twelfth street.

Willis Wildfern and Tom had heard this conversation—word by word. The latter paid no heed to it; the former drank in every syllable.

And then a strange revolution took place in Willis Wildfern's bosom—a weird, sinister and yet triumphant gleam flashed in his eye, and he laughed a low laugh all to himself—a laugh so low indeed, that his companion heard it not.

When the two reached Chestnut street, they took the shady side of Twelfth and hurried to Locust. Then down this avenue.

As they reached Eleventh street Wildfern suddenly paused, and drew Tom quickly in the shade of a large house.

"Sh! 'sh! Tom! See yonder!" and he pointed down the street.

"Blue-coats again, cap'n! Yes—I sees 'em. They've got their peepers on Lady Maud's shanty now! Ha! ha!" and the negro laughed guardedly.

"Yes—yes—and trouble is brewing—I feel it! Now, Tom, you must change the programme. Bring the carriage to the alley, between Locust and Spruce, in Twelfth. That alley leads to the yard of the house. 'Twill be all right. Now be off, Tom. In a half-hour hence I shall look for you at that alley."

Tom did not reply, but turning about walked up to Thirteenth street and disappeared in the darkness.

Wildfern waited a few minutes, and then followed after him. He paused, however, at the street above mentioned, and then returning toward Chestnut stopped at Walnut. Down the street he strode, until he reached Tenth. Here he again turned, going this time toward the south.

He walked rapidly on, not halting once again. On he went, and now he was near Fitzwater street. He slackened his pace and glanced over at the opposite row of houses.

Then, all at once, he stopped, as suddenly a light streamed from a window in one of these houses. He glanced thitherward, and as a low cry of exultation burst from his lips he turned at once and hurried back.

Verily Willis Wildfern was a man of iron to endure such exercise as he had taken this night!

We will now return to the time he entered the room of Sadie Sayton, and looked maliciously yet triumphantly around him.

His eyes, after flashing over the maiden, sought the goblet.

Then again he looked toward the girl.

"My God!" he muttered to himself, "the dose was enough to stupefy an elephant. But—but—as matters are, 'tis all right after all."

He turned familiarly into the room, and seated himself. The girl drew away, and covered her face with her hands.

"Be not alarmed!" said the man, composedly. "I come on business. I never break an engagement or promise. When last here I told you that I could show you a proof of this actor's perfidy toward you. To-night I have brought it. Here is the diamond pin he wore, and which I think you gave him. I received it from the woman he now loves! Take it, and examine it; you will recognize it!" and taking the jewel from his pocket he handed it to Sadie.

The girl shuddered, and then raising her head, reached out her hand and took the pin. One glance at it, and with a wild, agonizing cry, she tottered to her feet, and fell half-swooning upon the bed.

In her agony of mind she let fall the pin. Wildfern stooped and picked it up, transferring it to his pocket, *as he thought*. But he did not thus transfer it. In the eagerness with which he watched the girl, he did not notice that he failed to find the pocket.

The diamond rolled noiselessly to the floor.

"Oh, God! False! false! And I trusted him so blindly—loved him so tenderly! And thus for my dream to end! Oh, God! I can not live! Crush me to the earth—blot out my memory!" and heedless of the presence of the man, she buried her face in the bed-covering and sobbed aloud.

Willis Wildfern arose to his feet and softly approached the bed; then he laid his hand upon the girl's.

Sadie started as if bitten by an asp. In a moment she had escaped him, and stood on the opposite side of the room, a gleaming knife in her hand.

"Stand back, monster! stand back! or advance at your peril! I am desperate!" and she warningly brandished the dagger.

The man paused.

"I do not mean to harm you," he said; "I simply wish to tell you, my pretty one, that I have got one more proof to show you—one which will convince you beyond a peradventure that Frank Hayworth cares nothing for you. Would you, my fair girl, see that other proof?" and he gazed at her eagerly.

A strange calmness suddenly came over Sadie; a something within her which she could not define urged her to listen and to ponder.

A moment or so elapsed, when she looked up and said, in a voice preternaturally composed and quiet:

"Yes—I would see this other proof! For only then can I—will I—believe in his faithlessness!"

"Be it so!" said Wildfern, promptly; "you shall see this proof; but on these conditions: you will agree to be blindfolded, and will accompany me hence in a carriage, placing yourself wholly under my charge."

Sadie Sayton started—her face was pale as ashes.

"And how can I trust you?" she asked, with a gesture of loathing.

"I will swear solemnly any oath which you may dictate, that I will not harm you," was the reply.

Sadie pondered. Something seemed to impel her on. A maddening desire to see the perfidy of the man whom she had loved so devotedly, drove her to do—what an hour before she would have shrunk from even entertaining for an instant.

"I accept your terms," she said, in an ice-like tone. "But I warn you that I can and will defend myself, if occasion demand it."

"I do not object; but come. The hour is late, and the show, I am to unvail to your eyes, is now ready. The performance may be over, unless we hurry!" and he laughed satirically.

The girl answered not a word. She at once set about making her preparations.

Wildfern did not leave the room. In ten minutes Sadie was ready. In a few moments then—her hand grasping the dagger in her dress-pocket—she allowed her eyes to be blindfolded. Then taking the man's hand in hers, she left the room, and followed him who had held her a prisoner so closely.

At the foot of the stairs Lady Maud, looking stern and determined, suddenly appeared.

"I will go along for a change of air," she said, giving Wildfern a deep, significant look.

The man paused, and a dark, threatening cloud grew over his brow; but he did not say nay.

In a moment more the three were out in the yard. Then the gate in the wall was found, and they entered the alley—Sadie being between Lady Maud and Wildfern.

At last they reached the street. A carriage was there—a gigantic black man on the driver's box.

The three entered the vehicle, which was, at once, driven away rapidly.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DARKEST HOUR IS BEFORE THE DAWN.

THE carriage rolled and jolted on. The snow of the street was now cleared away—from the car-tracks at least. The vehicle was soon in these—on the Tenth street line—and it dashed away now, evenly and smoothly.

The man who drove the carriage was evidently an experienced hand; he managed the restive horses skillfully.

All this time Sadie sat in the carriage blindfolded and mute. Not a word had been spoken by any one.

Suddenly the girl felt a warm hand steal softly down to hers. At first she was inclined to draw away; but then she felt a warning pressure from the hand, and she knew it was a woman's. She covertly returned the silent grasp, and Sadie felt that she had sympathy now.

On rolled the carriage—the horses' feet echoing loud and clear as they moved away from the more noisy portion of the city.

Then the driver spoke to the animals in a low but distinct tone of command.

The carriage at once ceased its rapid motion.

Wildfern placed his head out of the carriage and glanced around.

"This will do; stop here, coachman," he said, in a low voice. "Draw out from the track, quick! There, that's right."

The carriage creaked, as its wheels were wrenched from the iron rails; but in a moment it was still.

"Now, my girl, as you value your life, keep quiet!" whispered Wildfern, hoarsely, in the ear of Sadie. "I will remove the bandage at once, and then you can look through the curtainless window to your left. Don't tremble so, or I will be afraid to trust you. . . . Are you ready?"

For an instant Sadie shook violently; but, then, by a strong effort, she controlled herself, and in answer to the man's question, simply bowed her head.

In the twinkling of an eye the blindfold was drawn from her eyes.

Sadie turned and gazed straight up at the flashing window.

With a wild cry, which she could not suppress, she instantly covered her face, and as a low, gurgling groan came from her bosom, she sunk back in the carriage.

That one glance had been enough!

"Oh, false! false! Oh, God! now I am ready to die! False! false!"

And again her agonizing cry wailed out distinctly in the air.

"Sh! 'sh! By —! this must be stopped!" exclaimed Wildfern, fiercely, at the same time covering her face with a handkerchief saturated with chloroform.

"Deal gently with her, Willis Wildfern! Gently, I tell you!" hissed the Lady Maud, as her bosom heaved with contending emotions.

But in a moment the girl's struggles ceased.

Then the carriage drove off.

Suddenly, as the vehicle moved away at a rapid rate, the poor girl, freeing herself from the handkerchief, again uttered a long wailing cry—this time for help.

In a moment the window of that house was suddenly hurled up, and Frank Hayworth peered forth. But the carriage was now under full headway and dashed up the street.

Then it was out of sight.

On it rolled; and at last it paused at the entrance of the alley on Twelfth street. Willis Wildfern sprang out.

"Come—come—hurry!" he exclaimed, rudely. "But see, Lady Maud, that the bandage is arranged. Hurry now, for time, with me, is precious!" and he stamped his foot impatiently as he glanced furtively around him in every direction.

In a moment, Sadie, blindfolded as before, descended. Wildfern took her by the arm, and hurried her into the alley, out of sight.

Then Lady Maud stepped from the carriage. Wildfern placed his mouth to her ear and whispered:

"Let all be ready to-morrow night, Lady Maud. Now is the time, when she is in despair. The trouble is almost over. Hark you! have every thing prepared. For Sadie Sayton will now be my wife. I'll get her gold!"

Without another word, he sprang up onto the box alongside the driver; and the carriage rattled away again.

But the Lady Maud had not answered; she stood still for a moment, gazing after the carriage. Then, shaking her head, she said, in a low, vengeful voice:

"Ay—ay! Willis Wildfern, now is the time indeed, and I'll have every thing ready! I'll thwart you, villain and murderer, if my heart's blood is the forfeit!"

So saying, she entered the alleyway, and linking the arm of the poor, trembling Sadie in hers, she drew her away, at the same time whispering a word of cheer in her ear.

Then they had passed through the little gate in the wall, and in a moment disappeared in the house.

For some minutes the Lady Maud said not a word. Still holding close to her breast the almost fainting girl, she conducted her up-stairs to her room. Opening the door, she gently pushed the maiden in.

"Sleep in peace, Sadie Sayton!" she said, in a warm, sympathizing voice. "Trust to me, for now, my child, I would die to save you!"

Instantly she closed the door, turned the lock, and hurried away.

Sadie heard her retreating footsteps dying away, and a gloom, more impenetrable than any midnight of woe she had yet experienced, crept over her.

Placing her dagger in her bosom, she flung her hands to her head and reeled into the room.

The gas, as ever, was burning low.

Suddenly Sadie paused, as if stricken by a rifle-ball. She glanced down on the carpet at her feet.

Her eyes had caught the sparkle and flash of a brilliant stone.

She stooped like a hawk on its quarry, and, in a second, had grasped the diamond-pin let fall by Willis Wildfern. She held it in a grip of iron. Then she slowly raised it on high, and gazed at it with a steady, strong stare.

As she gazed, gradually the meaningless stare left her eyes, the stern expression of her face faded away, and as a soft, old-time yearning look came again to the girlish countenance, she tottered forward and fell on her knees by the bedside.

Seconds, minutes, and then an hour passed. Then Sadie arose from her knees.

Her face was as calm as that of a marble Dian, as sweet and as holy as a Madonna's.

She gently kissed the little jewel, which she still held in her hand, and murmured:
"Oh, God! I love him still! I trust him still!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SETTLING A BILL.

THE carriage in which Sadie was taken down to see the terrible sight which had unnerved her, drove rapidly away. Wildfern was seated with the driver—Wild Tom, the negro.

They shaped their course toward Fairmount. Suddenly, when the carriage was descending the sharp hill at the further end of Coates street, a bright glare, away toward Laurel Hill Cemetery, flashed far up into the black sky. Then, in an instant all was darkness again, as there came a long, rambling, deadened report. Then all was still.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Wildfern, maliciously. "I had entirely forgotten our blue-coated friends, who have just now sprung the mine! Well—joy to them! And then the vehicle disappeared."

* * * We cannot wonder at the effect produced upon Sadie Sayton, by the sight revealed to her through the curtainless window of the boarding-house on South Tenth street.

What she saw was this: Frank Hayworth—as we know him—was seated by a table, his head bowed down upon his breast. Standing partly above him, and grasping one of his hands in hers—the other laid tenderly upon his head—was Agnes Hope, the actress.

And they were in the full glare of the light! But those who sat in the carriage had not heard the gentle, sympathizing words of Agnes as she smoothed back the actor's tangled hair, and said:

"Cheer up, my brother! My heart warms for you; and I will bless the day when Sadie's hand shall rest in yours."

The dawn of the next day glowed over the world. Frank Hayworth was seated moodily in his room. Gloom was still upon his brow, and shadows were swarming around him, despite the brilliant splendor of the day.

He had searched in vain through the city for Sadie, but could learn nothing of one answering to her description.

Then the advertisement of the ring, then that of the sorrow-stricken father, "sick in mind and in body," flashed constantly over him.

Truly his soul was "sorrow-laden." He had been endeavoring to study his part—a new role—for the evening's performance. But he had most signally failed to bring back the old fire; and now he had wearily cast aside the book, and sat, thinking darkly and dreaming dreams almost beyond conception.

Suddenly there came a ring at the bell; and then steps were heard ascending the stairs. They paused at the actor's door. Then came a decisive rap.

"Come in!" said Hayworth, turning around with some curiosity.

It was an odd hour for visitors.

The door was at once opened and Willis Wildfern, attired in the "tip" of fashion, entered the room with an easy, independent swagger.

The actor arose to his feet—his face growing darker and his brow contracting. But Wildfern did not wait for the other to speak. He drew a small strip of paper from his pocket and handed it toward the occupant of the room.

"Is that your writing, sir?" he asked, in an off-hand, business-like manner.

Frank Hayworth glanced over the paper. It was the strip he had tacked to the door of the old tenement-house in Catharine street, in which had lived the widow Hope. The reader will remember that the note was directed to the owner of the property—Wildfern.

"Yes, sir; that is my writing," replied the actor, quietly. "Not knowing your address, and, for good reasons, thinking that you occasionally looked after your tenants, I took that, as the best method, to convey to you the information thereon scribbled."

"Thank you for your information, sir, however conveyed; I have called for the rent."

"You shall have it at once. Please write a receipt," pointing to pen, ink and paper on the table, "while I count out the money. Miss Hope informed me of the amount," and Frank Hayworth drew from his pocket-book several notes.

Wildfern leisurely approached the table, and, with a languid air, wrote the required receipt. Then the actor handed him the money.

Some change was due, and Wildfern felt in his vest-pocket for it. As he drew out a handful of currency, a ring with a ruby setting fell from among the notes and rolled on the table.

In an instant Frank Hayworth's eyes had flashed upon the ring, and he reached to grasp it.

But Wildfern was too quick for him—for he clutched the jewel and transferred it to his pocket.

"Where did you get that ring, Willis Wildfern?" asked the actor, in a low stern voice.

"An impudent and an unwarrantable question, sir! But, to satisfy your womanish curiosity, I will reply: That ring is a present—I value it highly."

"A present? and—from whom?"

"Another impudent question! But, as before, I'll reply: From a pretty little Virginia girl—Sadie Sayton by name!"

At a bound Hayworth dashed madly toward him.

"Villain and falsifier! You lie!"

Wildfern quickly retreated behind the table, and drawing a revolver, aimed it at the other.

"Stand back!" he exclaimed in a low, hissing voice: "or I'll shoot you through the heart! Another time, and I'll make you eat your words, my fine fellow!"

With this he turned suddenly, opened the door and hurried down-stairs.

About four o'clock that afternoon, Willis Wildfern

covertly entered the little alley—opening into Twelfth street—and hurried down Eleventh.

In a moment he had reached the gate in the wall, through which entrance was had into the yard of Lady Maud's mansion. Then he was in the house.

Lady Maud was standing at the bottom of the stairs; but she did not speak to her visitor.

Wildfern noted her manner, and he read its meaning. But he pretended to observe nothing.

"I have just dropped in, Lady Maud, to say that it will be late to-night before I can visit this girl—my wife to be. So don't lock up; I'll come the back way. Be sure to have everything ready."

Then Wildfern hurried away again from the house.

And the Lady Maud smiled grimly, as she paused there by the staircase.

"Yes—yes, Willis Wildfern! I'll prepare for you! Poor—poor girl, she must be saved from him, or she must die! By heavens! she shall not give the promise!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A GLIMMER OF LIGHT.

ONCE again night had come, and with it duties which could not be postponed by Frank Hayworth, the actor. At the usual hour he bade Agnes goodbye and hurried away toward Chestnut street.

Then the play was over. How Frank got through his part, he did not know. But when the curtain was down he hurried away toward his lodging on Tenth street, and soon stood again in his room.

He turned the light on. As he did so he perceived a note lying on the table. It was directed to him, and the writing was one that he knew well. He opened and read:

"DEAR FRANK:

"I felt lonesome to-night all alone, and having nothing to do to while away the time I have determined to pay a visit to the old house on Catharine street. I wish to get a few articles I forgot to bring away with me. I write this that you may go to bed and not be uneasy about me, for it may be late before I return."

"Half-past nine o'clock."

AGNES."

Frank Hayworth glanced at his watch. It was now after eleven.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed; "how imprudent! And all alone! I will go for her at once. She may be in that old house and afraid to come home alone."

A few moments from that time Frank Hayworth, strode down toward Catharine street. He walked briskly, for in addition to all his other troubles, this one of Agnes's absence was by no means the least.

Catharine street was reached. He turned up, and hurried on. Suddenly he paused as a long, piercing cry for help, rung out on the still air. And then another and another cry; and then the shrieks struggled forth in a gurgling sound. Then all was quiet.

Frank Hayworth knew that cry—he knew, too, the throat whence it issued. His blood almost congealed within him, and then it boiled! With an imprecation, which he could not restrain, upon his lips, he sprang forward at a run.

Only a moment elapsed before he stood at the door of the old house, which the reader knows well.

He shook the door until it rattled again; but it yielded not.

And all was silent in the house.

Frank Hayworth placed his shoulder against the panel and at one vigorous effort sent the door flying back with an echoing crash. Then he sprang into the dark hall, and in a moment his feet were spurning the creaking staircase. Then he reached the top, and in a moment had burst like a whirlwind into the front room, in which a light was gleaming.

The sight which fell on the actor's vision filled his soul with horror, and stung him to vengeance. His bosom swelled and his eyes shot fire.

Lying on the bed, her hair disheveled, her garments torn and in disarray, her face bloodless and deathlike, her hands nerveless and hanging by her side, lay Agnes Hope, limp and motionless.

Standing over her and clutching her in a wicked grasp—his eyes burning and his breast heaving, was Willis Wildfern, the man about town. In his hand was a bloody knife, and the ruby gore was welling from Agnes Hope's forehead. But the incision was slight.

The scoundrel raised his head as Frank Hayworth rushed into the room, and in an instant he thrust his other hand in his bosom.

But the actor heeded not the menacing gesture. Striding fearlessly into the room, he exclaimed in a deep, indignant voice:

"Villain! monster! And would you thus disfigure YOUR OWN SISTER?"

Wildfern straightened up, staggered away and flung his hands to his head. His face paled, and his eyes seemed to start from their sockets. He clutched at a chair for support and gasped out:

"What mean you—what say you, Frank Hayworth?"

"That Agnes Hope is your half-sister—that your father was hers—that she is your own flesh and blood."

"My God! How know you this?"

"I have the proof—a marriage-certificate," was the reply.

Wildfern uttered no further word; but with his face like a dead man's, he staggered away, reeled out of the room and tottered down-stairs.

The actor did not endeavor to prevent him; he stood to one side and allowed the stricken man to pass unmolested.

Then the outside door closed with a sudden snap, and the actor heard Wildfern's hasty yet unsteady steps dying away in the distance.

The actor turned toward the bed on which lay the girl.

Agnes had swooned; she had not heard a word of what had passed between the men.

Frank Hayworth suddenly paused as he saw the glitter of something bright and sparkling at his feet. He stooped and picked it up.

He started, and a cry of joy broke from him as he saw that he held in his hand a ring with a ruby setting! In an instant he had placed it in his pocket. Then he approached the unconscious girl.

He succeeded readily in arousing her, and in ten minutes the two were on their way homeward.

They had not proceeded two squares before, suddenly, the fire-bells rung out a wild, startling alarm.

Then a bright, up-reaching glow flashed in the dark night.

The fire was in the direction of Eleventh and Locust streets.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A HERO AND HIS REWARD.

THERE were others than Frank Hayworth and Agnes Hope who saw the sudden crimsoning of the sky that cold winter night.

Willis Wildfern, his head reeling, his feet tottering beneath him, his ears ringing out the words of the actor: "AND WILL YOU THUS DISFIGURE YOUR OWN SISTER!" heard the clanging bells and the cry of fire and saw the sky suddenly grow red with the glimmer of the up-licking flames.

The man paused and gazed far down the street toward the bright, spreading reflection. Then a rattling fire-engine with its noisy band of red-shirted heroes, dashed by with its clatter and clangor.

Wildfern hailed one of the firemen.

"Where is the fire, my man?" he asked.

"Locust, 'bove 'leventh;" was the reply, as the fireman hurried on with his shouting company.

"Locust above Eleventh!" muttered Wildfern, leaning for an instant against a tree-box.

He buttoned his coat tightly around him, and dashed away at full speed.

Then another and another engine clattered by—their jangling bells ringing wildly on the night-air.

The sky was now red like scarlet, and the air was filled with brightly-flashing sparks, borne upward in giddy, circling eddies, until they were lost in the dense festoons of black smoke hovering over the doomed pile.

Frank Hayworth, half-carrying the fainting form of Agnes in his arms, hastened along as rapidly as he could toward his lodgings. He was anxious to escape the crowd which was thronging the streets.

Despite his melancholy surroundings the young man experienced a kind of sad, somber happiness; for, now, whatever and wherever Sadie might be, he possessed a link which would bind him at least to her memory. He now had the little ring, which he had slipped on that taper little finger long ago, the black night on the wharf overhanging the yellow tide of the James.

Now and then he cheered Agnes by consolatory words, and hurried on.

At last he stood on the steps of the lodging-house. He breathed heavily—for his exertions had been fearful, to say nothing of the worry of mind he had been experiencing for several days.

As he was adjusting the dead-latch-key, he paused.

"What is it, my men?" asked Hayworth.

"One of our boys, sir—hurt badly. He was trying to save a young woman from the burning house, and he missed his footing and fell," replied the fireman.

"And is the young woman saved?" continued Hayworth, his voice trembling, he knew not why.

"No, sir, and that's the worst of it, sir! The poor thing somehow or other is locked up in a room. 'Tis thought she has been duped, as the house, to say the least, is owned by a notorious woman."

And the group passed on.

Frank Hayworth shook like a leaf.

Whispering to Agnes to go in and seek her bed, he turned at once and dashed away toward the fire.

Willis Wildfern at length reached Locust street. As he was rushing around the corner, he suddenly felt some one touch him on the shoulder. Glancing quickly about him, he saw the tall form of Wild Tom.

"Come along, Tom!" he exclaimed in a deep labored voice. "The thing's up! Lady Maud has hauled down her colors. The old hag has gold! Help yourself to it, while I attend to other matters!"

"Dat's what I'm here for, Marse Cap'n!" replied the negro, his red eyeballs showing distinctly in the lurid light.

Then they dashed on through the surging crowd, and in a moment had entered the burning house.

The fire seemed to be at the rear of the mansion; the flames were bursting forth there. The long hall of the front building was filled with smoke. Firemen were on the first floor; but they dared not face the fiery element raging above.

Willis Wildfern knew a back way to reach the second story. Followed by Tom, his dark soul filled with black thoughts, the man dashed through the smoke-curtained hall until he reached the door leading to the yard.

Here was the small back staircase.

Wildfern had scarcely set foot on the first step, when, suddenly, he was confronted by Lady Maud, who rose like a giant from the half-lurid gloom.

"Stand back, man!" she hissed in his face, at the same time jerking a long, keen knife from her bosom, and baring her stalwart right arm. "Stand back, Willis Wildfern! I know your hellish purpose! I know that blood is on your soul, and I tell you I'll die before you enter the room of Sadie Sayton! If die she must, I swear before high heaven she shall die unpolluted by the touch of such as you! I cannot save her, but I'll give up a thousand lives before

you shall reach her! Now, villain, stand back, or—come on and cross knives with me!" and the brawny woman flung herself full in his way.

Wildfern did not hesitate long. In an instant his knife, too, was in his hand; and then, with a frenzied cry of vengeance, he flung himself upon his adversary.

Wild Tom looked on through the smoke, like some demon of the infernal regions.

At that instant a tall, athletic figure, coatless, hatless, ax in hand, rushed with flying feet into the passage. The glimmer of the lurid light to the rear shone in his face.

For an instant Lady Maud turned and saw that face.

"On with you, Frank Hayworth! up-stairs—second room to right! On, man! and save the pure spotless girl who loves you to the death!"

And with a loud cry Frank Hayworth sprang up, and disappeared amid the flame and smoke. He cared for nothing now—fire—nor falling timbers—nor death in any shape! for nothing, save one grand object! That object he would accomplish or—die!

In a moment he was up-stairs—at the designated door. The ax circled around his head, and the panel was shattered to atoms! Another blow, and the door fell with a crash.

Hayworth bounded in.

Kneeling by the bedside, her long golden-hued hair falling in disordered masses over her half-bare shoulders—her hands clasped tremblingly together—her eyes cast aloft, was Sadie Sayton.

She was praying to the God of heaven and earth!

"SADIE!"

"ALLAN!"

And the two confronted each other.

"Art true to me still, Allan?" whispered the girl, amid the roar and crackle of the flames.

"As the needle to the star!"

No other words were spoken by them. There was no time—no need.

In a moment the actor had grasped the tender woman's form in his arms. Nerving himself for the mighty effort—the trying ordeal—he whispered:

"Be brave, Sadie, and trust me!"

Then he darted from the room, around which now the flames were licking; then down-stairs—then through the hot curtains of stagnant smoke, out into the air of the night.

Then a wild shout swelled forth from the swaying crowd without, and Frank Hayworth, with his burden, sunk swooning amid the enthusiastic, sympathizing throng.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A LITTLE RETRIBUTION.

"SAVED! Thank God!" muttered the Lady Maud, as she heard the ringing cheer. "Now! Willis Wildfern, the time has come, and we'll settle accounts forever!" and she dashed with the fury of a tiger upon him.

They had fought their way to the little back way, and at last stood directly over the concealed well.

In their mad, furious efforts, the lid which covered the chasm was hurled aside.

At that moment Lady Maud drove her knife full into the neck of Wildfern, just as his dagger sheathed itself deep in her bosom.

They sunk to the ground with a cry and a groan. Then from the gloom of the overhanging wall, suddenly emerged a tall, gigantic figure.

It was Wild Tom.

Stooping down, after glancing about him, he seized both of the writhing forms in his powerful grasp, and by a sudden effort hurled them headlong down the gaping well.

There came up one wild, gurgling, sputtering cry, and Tom was about to step away, but he paused—for at that moment three brawny policemen darted through the smoke into the yard.

Tom hesitated not, but sprang to the gate in the wall, and dashed out into the alley. Two of the policemen rushed after him; but the third one paused as he stood on the very brink of the well and chanced to glance down.

The lurid flame flashing upward in the smoke-laden air shone in a fitful reflection straight down into the yawning chasm.

The sight revealed made the sturdy officer stand back and exclaim:

"Great God!"

But hesitating no longer, he likewise sprang through the gate and followed on to join his companions in the chase.

He had not gone a moment before the walls of the backbuilding fell with a terrible crash—debris filling the yard and choking up the well.

Then the flames communicated to the front portion of the house, and despite the heroic efforts of the firemen, it was, in a few moments, enveloped in swaying billows of flame.

Tom fled away like wind. At first he distanced his pursuers; but those men, like himself, were men of iron, nor once lost sight of him.

On he dashed. Tom had now taken a cross street, and reached Coates. Up this he turned. Then the chase grew hotter than ever.

On sped the giant black; he was now fast nearing Fairmount. His object was plain. He was endeavoring to reach the burrow leading through the hill into the old vault, at Laurel Hill Cemetery.

At length he reached the river. He was panting with exertion. He glanced around him. There, not a hundred paces behind him, came the policemen. Then suddenly a flash spitted out in the gloom, and a whizzing bullet sung over Tom's head.

The negro hesitated no longer; he darted to the river-bank, and without pausing a moment sprang out upon the ice, which was now a half-foot thick.

On—on! And now Girard avenue bridge showed

dimly in the gloom. Tom was already within its huge shadow.

Then suddenly he disappeared from sight; and a moment after a heavy, sullen splash reverberated beneath the long span, and echoed in the night-air.

The policemen, who had followed, hastened on, and in a few minutes they stood by a large hole in the black ice. For a moment they silently gazed on.

Then one of them said in a low voice:

"Well, it's all right! The black rascal has gone down in the air-hole, and the gallows is cheated, that's all. Come, let's go back!"

Without another word, the officers hurried away toward the neighboring bank on the canal side and disappeared.

They had not been gone two minutes, when, suddenly, a dark object appeared above the water in the air-hole. Then the body of a man showed.

Placing his hands on the broken edge of the ice, the man slowly drew himself out of the freezing water, and crawling carefully away from the treacherous spot, he straightened himself up.

"Ha! ha!" he chuckled; "a mons'rous close shave, dat! But dat fernal air-hole dar give me a lift after all! . . . I'll change dese rags, and den—why I think it's 'bout time to git!"

Thus speaking, Tom shook himself like a water-dog, and hurrying away, disappeared up the ice-covered river.

Late that night, in Frank Hayworth's room on Tenth street, Sadie Sayton, pale, almost pulseless, lay on the actor's bed. Kneeling by her side, holding her hand, was Frank Hayworth. At the girl's head, gently brushing back the long rippling locks, was Agnes Hope.

At length Sadie opened her eyes, and glanced around her. Her gaze fell on the portrait of herself on the wall—then on Agnes—then on the actor.

"Thank God, Allan! You ARE true!" she murmured.

And then in one breath the actor and the actress said, in a voice just above a whisper:

"Saved!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

L'ENVOI!

THE morning after the great fire on Locust street, Frank Hayworth (or Allan Hill), seated in the little parlor of the boarding-house, suddenly started as his eyes fell upon a certain notice in the paper.

He read that notice several times. Then, as a singular expression came to his face—an expression of sadness and sunlight mingled—he arose to his feet, and walked slowly from the room.

He ascended the stairs and reaching his own room, rapped gently on the panel.

Agnes answered the summons.

"Is Sadie awake, my sister?" asked the young man, in a low, trembling voice.

"Yes, Frank, and dressed. Come in," and Agnes made way for him to enter.

The actor, paper in hand, walked into the room. He passed no salutations with the maid he loved, but, drawing near her, knelt by her side, took her hand in his, and said, feelingly:

"Nerve yourself, Sadie, and read that paragraph," and without further word, he gave her the paper, pointing at the same time to the notice.

Sadie did as directed.

One glance and her face paled, and the blood fled away from her lips. Then dropping the paper, she raised her eyes aloft, and murmured:

"Thy will, oh Lord, be done!"

Then she drew Agnes to her side and pillowed her head on her sympathizing bosom.

That notice read tersely thus:

"If this should meet the eye of Miss Sadie Sayton, of Sayton Manor, Charles City County, Va., she is earnestly requested to return at once to her home. It is our sad duty thus to announce the death of her father, who passed away praying for her presence, and blessing her name.

"(Signed), ARTHUR GORDON,
JAMES CLARKE,
"Executors of the Sayton Estate."

We will not linger here. There is no need. Suffice it to state that Allan Hill never appeared on the stage again, under the name of Frank Hayworth, or any other. That very day he threw up his engagement at the "Chestnut," much to the regret of the management.

We shall not attempt to describe the meeting between Fanny and her long-lost mistress, which took place this same day—the one after the fire.

In one week—during which time Allan Hill had transferred his lodgings to the St. Lawrence Hotel, taking along with him the shrinking, pale-faced, yet happy-hearted Agnes—the party left for New York. There they took passage for Virginia in the Norfolk steamer.

And the gentle Agnes, whom Sadie already loved devotedly, went with the party.

Six months from that time, in the grand old mansion of Sayton Manor, Allan Hill and Sadie, the heiress, stood up in the face of a large company, and plighted their faith, the one to the other.

When the ceremony was over, Sadie, in a quiet moment, archly drew from beneath the glove of her left hand a small jewel, and holding it up to Allan, said in his ear:

"Here, darling husband; I give you again the diamond-pin, which you did not bestow upon another fair one!"

Allan Hill bowed his fine head; and then drawing from his pocket a parcel, he handed it to Sadie, saying:

"And I restore to you, my sweet wife, the ring which you did not bestow upon a treacherous man!"

And at that marriage ceremony Agnes Hope officiated as bridesmaid. Nor did any one in that

vast company which thronged Sayton Manor, save Allan Hill and herself, know the great sacrifice which the noble girl had made!

But on the altar of her pure and holy heart that night a sacred fire was burning—the incense-fumes from which were wafted up, even into the celestial courts, and accepted there as a sweet offering of resignation and obedience to a fiat which no mortal could disobey.

Months after the conflagration at the mansion of the unfortunate, misguided, and to-be-pitied Lady Maud, when the bricks had cooled, workmen gathered there to clear away the rubbish, preparatory to erecting on the spot a more lordly dwelling.

In clearing away the ruins from the little back yard, the well was exposed to view. Down this well one of the workmen chanced to glance.

The terrible sight then revealed, led to an investigation, and two half-charred, half-decayed bodies were discovered. They were readily recognized, however, as those of Wildfern and Lady Maud, who had long been missing.

Along with those bodies were also found two skeletons, bleached and rattling.

No one, however, could read the horrible secret of that well.

Several years passed, and one morning Allan Hill passed as he read a death-notice.

That day, in the presence of his wife, he read the notice to the sweet-faced, pensive Agnes; and then, showing her an old, faded marriage-certificate, told her the secret of her birth, her relationship to the wicked Willis Wildfern, and then informed her of her wealth.

Allan and his wife accompanied Agnes Hope to Philadelphia.

There was no trouble in getting possession of her property.

But Agnes returned, after making suitable arrangements with a lawyer in regard to her riches, back to Virginia with Allan Hill and Sadie.

There she lives to-day, sweet-tempered, quiet and happy.

And Allan and his darling wife are happy, too,—happy as the parents of two lovely twin-daughters, one of whom answers to the name of "Agnes," the other, the fair-haired, to that of "Ruby."

THE END.

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